

46
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CONTENTS

NOTES 174

ARTICLES

Richard Gilman	<i>Reflections on Decadence</i>	175
Leon Botstein	<i>German Terrorism from Afar</i>	188
Marshall Berman	<i>Baudelaire: Modernism in the Streets</i>	205
Elizabeth Fox-Genovese	<i>The Ambiguities of Female Identity: A Reading of the Novels of Margaret Drabble</i>	234
Robert Fagan	<i>Christina Stead</i>	262
Christina Stead	<i>On the Women's Movement</i>	271
John Tytell	<i>Composure and Decomposition:</i>	280
Jay Martin	<i>Three Pieces on</i>	
Tony Tanner	<i>the Fiction Collective</i>	

STORY

James Hoggard	<i>A Gift from the Scorched Moon</i>	223
---------------	--------------------------------------	-----

POEMS 249

Liam Rector, Elizabeth Wray, Robert Louthan, Bill Elliott, Tom Luhrmann, Alan Nadel, James Bertolino, Jonathan Cott, Steven Hall, Tony Towle, Arthur Vogelsang, Carol Polcovar, Ken Fifer

GOING TO THE MOVIES

Jonathan Baumbach	<i>Letter from Seattle</i>	275
-------------------	----------------------------	-----

BOOKS

- | | | |
|------------------------|---|------------|
| Jules Chametzky | <i>On the Edge of Destruction: Jews of Poland between the Two Wars</i>
by Celia Heller | 298 |
| David Rieff | <i>The Life of the Automobile</i>
by Ilya Ehrenburg | 302 |
| Neil Schmitz | <i>The Dead Father;
Guilty Pleasures;
Great Days</i>
by Donald Barthelme | 306 |

LETTERS

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|------------|
| Ludwig Greve | <i>To Hannah Arendt</i> | 310 |
| | | 317 |

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NOTES

RICHARD GILMAN's "Reflections on Decadence" is an excerpt from his book *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet*, which will be published this spring by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. . . . **LEON BOTSTEIN** is an historian and President of Bard College. . . . **MARSHALL BERMAN** teaches at the City University of New York. This piece is a shorter version of a chapter in his forthcoming book, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: Studies in Modernism and Modernization*. . . . **JAMES HOGGARD** has published a collection of poems, *Eyesigns*. He teaches English at Midwestern State University in Texas. . . . Associate Professor of History at the University of Rochester, **ELIZABETH FOX-GENOVESE** is the author of *The Origins of Physiocracy: Economic Revolution and Social Order in Eighteenth-Century France*. . . . Poet and playwright **ELIZABETH WRAY** is managing editor of *Black Box Magazine* and *Watershed Tapes* in Washington, D.C. . . . Last year **ROBERT LOUTHAN** won the Grolier Poetry Prize and was a Bread Loaf scholar. . . . **WILLIAM ELLIOTT**'s *The Poem at the Bottom of the Lake* is his sixth collection of poems. . . . **TOM LUHRMANN** lives and works in New York City. . . . **ALAN NADEL** teaches English at Douglass College of Rutgers University. . . . **JAMES BERTOLINO**'s *New and Selected Poems* was published in 1978. He is co-editor of *Cincinnati Poetry Review*. . . . **JONATHAN COTT** is the author of a collection of poems, *City of Earthly Love*, and of *Forever Young*. . . . Originally from Scotland, **STEVEN HALL** now lives in New York, where he is a student at Columbia University. . . . **TONY TOWLE**'s most recent books are *Autobiography*, and *Other Poems and Works on Paper*. . . . Carnegie Mellon Press will soon publish **ARTHUR VOGELSANG**'s first book of poems. He is an editor of *The American Poetry Review*. . . . **CAROL POLCOVAR** is co-founder and co-editor of *The Helen Review*. Her first book of poems, *Riddle*, will be released in the fall. . . . *Falling Man*, **KEN FIFER**'s first book of poems, will be published by Ithaca House this spring. . . . In 1976 **ROBERT FAGAN** won the Bennett Cerf Memorial Prize for Poetry. . . . **JONATHAN BAUMBACH**'s fifth novel, *Chez Charlotte and Emily*, will appear this year. He is currently a Guggenheim Fellow and living in France. . . . **JOHN TYTELL** is Professor of English at Queens College and author of *Naked Angels: The Lives and Literature of the Beat Generation*. . . . **JAY MARTIN**'s *Winter Dreams: An American in Moscow* was recently published by Houghton Mifflin. . . . **TONY TANNER** is a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge. His new book, *Contract and Transgression: Adultery and the Novel*, will be out this fall. . . . Former editor of *The Massachusetts Review*, **JULES CHAMETZKY** is Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and author of *From the Ghetto: The Fiction of Abraham Cahan*. . . . **DAVID RIEFF**'s work has appeared in *Vogue*, *Fiction*, *The Paris Review*, and others. He lives in New York City. . . . **NEIL SCHMITZ** teaches English at the State University of New York at Buffalo and is finishing a book on American humor. . . . **LUDWIG GREVE** works at the German Literary Archive at Marbach, where he met Hannah Arendt in 1975.

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Richard Gilman

REFLECTIONS ON DECADENCE

The belief that there are periods in the arts when, after a brilliant flowering, decline sets in and an erstwhile robustness lapses into debility and enervation, goes on being held in the face of the clearest truth that powerful art does not “give way” to weak art, turning into it like an organism running down, although what we think of as strong art may indeed be succeeded by the weak. The idea would seem to derive from the same anthropomorphic bent, the same impulse to interpret from analogy to the body’s fate, that we have seen at work in the political and social spheres.

That there have been and continue to be times of great artistic vigor and assured style followed by ones of depleted energy and uncertain manner; and that periods of imitation often succeed ones of notable originality, is scarcely to be denied. But the problem with thinking of those presumably inferior cultural eras as “decadent” begins with the historical fact that in art both the imitative and the crude—the seemingly bereft of skill—have been accorded the designation. And you cannot have it both ways: the imitative strives to be like the model; the crude or primitive represents precisely a failure to be like it, to reach its level.

Now, imitation in art may be bad (Ortega y Gasset called it “nothing,” a principle of emptiness), but to call it decadent is to abandon the word’s only plausible meaning. For if “decadence” means a “falling down” or “away,” which is what every dictionary offers as its root sense, then the imitative by its very nature could hardly be decadent, since its repetition of what has been validated and sanctified in the imaginative realm is proof of its respect for, its unquestioning acceptance of, the norm. One may argue that the imitative might be considered decadent because it falls away from an ideal of originality, but this is not how critics or academics, in their concern for safety in cultural judgments, have ever argued. In any case, imitation is its own condemnation and has no need for “decadence” to inform us about itself.

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The reason for this academic tropism toward “decadence” as a category is most likely because, consciously or not, historians of culture generally argue, as I have said, from the example of the body. And, consciously or not, they believe in progress, however they may qualify the idea by turning it, for instance, into a notion of cyclic rather than linear advance. In this view imitation, the arrest of an art at some high level, in making it spin around on itself, impedes the flow of progress and stops things in their tracks.

An even greater and more obvious blow to progress, its apparent reversal, is the advent of the crude and uncertain or of smaller creations in artistic life. What so upsets most historians of later Roman painting, to take one example, is the seeming loss of mastery in the depiction of the human body. What displeases many critics of fiction today about their contemporaries is the modest nature of their ambitions and their achievements in relation to those of the giants of nineteenth-century literature and music.

Yet if art becomes rougher or smaller this is only in comparison to the finer or bigger, and only matters if one holds the latter qualities as ideals. In that case one would not be judging works of art in themselves but by reference to abstract measurements, which is of course how works of art have generally been judged by professional judges. But artists at any time may *choose* to be smaller or cruder than their predecessors, out of a wish, it may be, for a release from the grand, the confidently *finished*. Or else they may be like Paul Klee, who said that at the beginning of his career he had wanted to create an art “as solid and enduring as that of the museums” but had found himself in actuality only able to proceed as a painter through the inspiration—the examples of possibility—of things as tiny and transient as the forms of sea life he once observed through the glass bottom of a boat in the Bay of Naples. They may, that is, only be *able* to do lesser or cruder work as the price—if it is one—of refusing to imitate. In any case the smaller or cruder is not necessarily the inferior and, beyond that, there is no logical or inevitable or inherent process by which the superior in art yields to the inferior, health to sickness, or monumentality to depletion.

In his introduction to Huysmans’ *A Rebours* Havelock Ellis wrote that “there seems to be no more pronounced mark of the decadence of a people and its literature than a servile and rigid subserviency to rule.” This condition may be unfortunate but it has nothing to do with “decadence,” if the word is to mean anything at all. With his wonderfully clear sense of how “decadence” has been corrupted as a word,

Rémy de Gourmont asserted that in relation to art it can only mean imitation, in which case it would not mean what it always has formally. And he pointed out how in so volatile a linguistic atmosphere as that of late nineteenth-century France poets like Verlaine and Mallarmé found it possible to assimilate the idea of decadence as imitation to its exact opposite—the idea of innovation. Going even further to the root of the question, de Gourmont challenged the habit of “blaming” bad or inferior periods of art on a process of the degeneration of the superior. He writes:

From Racine to Vigny, France produced no great poet. It is a fact. . . . But it is not necessary to go beyond the fact itself, nor to attribute to it an absurd character of logic and necessity. Poetry was asleep during the eighteenth century, through a lack of poets; but this failure was not the result of an excessively rich flowering of poets earlier. It was what it was and nothing more. If we give it the name of decadence, we admit a sort of mysterious organism—a being, a woman, Poetry, which is born, reproduces, and dies at almost regular intervals, in accordance with the habits of human generation—an agreeable conception, a subject for a dissertation or a lecture.

The dissertations continue to be written and the lectures given. In a frequently perceptive book on the intellectual life of the nineteen sixties, Morris Dickstein speaks of the unsure experiments of contemporary American writers like John Barth, Donald Barthelme, and Thomas Pynchon as constituting the “decadence of Modernism.” What is wrong with this formulation, to begin with, is the premise that there is in fact such a thing as Modernism, that it is a species of being, an entity. Against the conventional wisdom, I would suggest that it is actually only a label, a term whose origins are obscure but which has been given currency and status in the academy, where most such nomenclature—expressionism, post-Christian, etc.—generally flourishes. But of course the great literature of the earlier part of the century has to be regarded metaphorically as an organism, a creature, in order for it to be capable of decadence, capable, that is, of having a life-cycle of the kind de Gourmont spoke about.

Of what use is an ascription of “decadence” to the writing that has followed Proust, Joyce, Eliot, Mann, and the rest? If newer writing is inferior, this is not because its predecessor had fallen into a sort of old age and decrepitude. The earlier writing was what it was; you may search for the grounds of its amplitude, which is what the subsequent writing is always measured against, and find them perhaps in any

number of social or psychic conditions. But those are not its *causes*. The newer writing is what it is, in itself, and in relation to the past, naturally, but not totally dependent on it. Influences abound, granted, learning takes place, models are accepted or rejected. But literature is not written to compose literary history; moreover, the past may be burdensome or even dictatorial, but it is never an absolute monarch.

Serious writers at any time write as they will and as they must. They do not “fall down” or “away from” standards, for the standards themselves are constantly changing and new writing is precisely what changes them. Only a lofty, categorizing, anthropomorphizing impulse, one whose effect, if not intention, is to turn art into the material for dissertations, would find decadence in what is really fluctuation, the long rhythms of human expression. In cultural matters at least “decadence” explains nothing and reveals nothing but our apparently unappeasable hunger for neat, fateful explanations of the essentially mysterious processes of creation.

“What those who speak of a decadent society or a decadent person mean,” wrote British philosopher C. E. M. Joad, “must have something in common with what is meant when they speak of a decadent literature.” There is some truth to this, though it is diminishing as the word splits more and more sharply into its academic and popular usages. What is common to all employment of “decadence” as a pejorative is a quality of accusation, to the point of anathema, in the interest of a defense of something valued, felt to be essential or, if it does not yet exist, deeply desired. This function of the word has frequently led to its being used to denote opposites at the same time. In the eighteenth century, for example, French churchmen thought the nation was growing decadent because of the waning of religious spirit and practice, while anticlericals argued that her decadence was due precisely to the persistence of religious institutions.

Intellectual and cultural history is full of instances of “decadence” being used as a club to beat what is seen as the betrayal or repudiation of one or another value. Oswald Spengler thought the “giganticism” and inflation of the American mind and imagination absolute proofs of our decadence, and wrote, in defense presumably of an ideal of discretion or elitism, that “nothing more clearly displays the decadence of Western art since the middle of the nineteenth century than its absurd mass-wide rendering of nudes.” According to Konrad Swart, Charles Péguy thought the “degeneration of republican idealism into a

despicable republican practice . . . perfectly illustrated how decadence ensued from the replacement of a mystique by a politique."

In Chekhov's *The Seagull*, Madame Arkadina calls her son "decadent" after watching the abortive play he has written in part as an attack on her own brand of conventional, "decadent" theater. Besides condemning as decadent all erotic subjects in literature, the aged Tolstoy asserted that the "shutting out of the masses from the pleasures of art" was a central characteristic of a decadent culture. Even Oscar Wilde, the unrivaled victim of the word's vagueness and malleability, contributed to the confusion. In *The Decay of Lying* his spokesman Vivian says that "the third stage is when life gets the upper hand and drives Art out into the wilderness. This is the true decadence and it is from this that we are now suffering." Here the primacy of art is being defended against the "decadence" of all that refuses to acknowledge it.

Although he never wrote a sustained work on the subject, Nietzsche's writings are full of comments on and references to decadence, and these hundreds of occasions make up a lexicon of the word's uses as a term of disapprobation, as well as of everything about it that is generally ambiguous and disconcerting. At the center of his obsession with the decadent is his conviction that civilization went wrong at a very early date. In *The Will to Power*, the book of his which uses the word most vehemently and in the most diverse and startling contexts, he writes that "the great Greek philosophers represent the decadence of every Greek excellence and make it contagious."

His argument, which will recommend itself only to those who share his fundamental interpretations of human experience in history, was that philosophy had the effect of making virtue "abstract," which in turn was "the greatest temptation to make oneself abstract: i.e., to detach oneself." Writing about Socrates, he says that "one had only one choice: either to perish or to be absurdly rational." He means that the disintegration of the age, caused by what he interprets as the excessive demands of the instincts, could only be cured by a Socratic type of rational control. But this control was decadent because it set itself up against the instinctual life; it represented a decline, a "falling away."

Whether or not one accepts this theory of the relationship between rationality and the instinctive life, it is undeniable that Nietzsche's ascription of decadence to the birth of philosophic thinking runs counter to any use we could have imagined for the word. But Nietzsche is prodigal with such shifts or reversals of the word's previously

accepted meanings and usages. Philosophy, religion, and morality (any moral system at all) are decadent or symptoms of decadence, he argues. "Woman has always conspired with the types of decadence, the priests, against the powerful, the strong, the men," because she "brings the children to the cult of piety, pity, love." "Ugliness signifies the decadence of a type"; "to let oneself be determined by one's environment is decadent"; *Don Quixote* is "part of the decadence of Spanish culture"; "the 'good' and 'bad' man are merely two types of decadent"; "one wonders whether a tendency towards generalizations is not already a symptom of decadence."

Though these formulations are intelligible and persuasive in varying degrees, the important thing about them is that they all arise from Nietzsche's violent decisions about what constitutes health or illness, vigor or debility, in individuals as well as in societies. Thought weakens the emotions; pity weakens the strong; generalizations take the edge off the specificities of the world; *Don Quixote* mocks the boldness of the chivalric imagination; "good" and "bad" participate in a system of moral evaluation that attenuates fierce, original human energy.

All this may be true, if such matters can ever be said to be true or false, but, in any case, Nietzsche's use of "decadent" to describe nearly every manifestation of what he sees as humanity's mistaken course leaves the word emptied of nearly all substance. After treatment like this it exists without specificity, as an expostulation, a black mark, a debit sign, its original stock of meaning, however unclear and contradictory that might have been, is long since exhausted. De Gourmont might have been thinking of Nietzsche when he wrote that "stripped of its mysticism, its necessity, of all its historical genealogy, the idea of 'decadence' is reduced to a purely negative idea, to the simple idea of absence."

To begin to account for "decadence" passing through so many uses, so many oscillations, divergences and reversals of meaning, its being, in different periods, both a curse and an aggressive term of honor—as it was in late nineteenth-century France—and its falling so easily into the simulacra of meaning which intellectual fashion of the kind we are witnessing today has the power to contrive—we have to see it as damaged, or vulnerable, from the start. To speak in this way of an "injured" word may seem an indulgence in the sort of anthropomorphism we have been rejecting. If this is so, one may describe it as a form of intellectual judo, using an opponent's strength or weight against him, or else as a species of homeotherapy.

Once again, there are few things more difficult intellectually than to trace the biography or career of a word, an abstraction concerning whose existence there are no *facts*, only instances of its appearance in the guise of facts. To get finally at "decadence" we must now appeal to a faculty or operation of the mind we can acknowledge in other less problematic areas. This movement is one which gives us a sensation of being in a sort of shady and embarrassing transaction with language, an irresolute and often enervating intercourse with it.

If "decadence" is anything it is an epithet, and epithets of an aggressive and not merely a descriptive kind, invective, all types of verbal blows against actualities, disguise a loss of power and give off a simultaneous feeling of wishfulness and fear. Words that seek to maim, to diminish or do away with parts of reality (or for that matter to enhance, enlarge or transfigure them) issue from a realm of the mind in which magic still holds sway. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but an epithet will, through sorcery, turn them into powder.

Alberto Moravia has written shrewdly about the way epithets, ascriptions and the like have functioned in the largest historical contexts:

During the Middle Ages, antiquity was completely alien to men because it was pagan, whereas the Middle Ages were Christian, and Christianity wanted to be, and was, the paradox and opposite of paganism. Christianity wanted, consciously wanted, antiquity to be alien and unknown, to be denied, ignored, thrust into obscurity. In order to achieve this result it performed a very simple operation: it gave sin and damnation the face of antiquity: or rather, it gave antiquity the face of sin and damnation.

Moravia might have added: Christianity gave antiquity the *name* of sin and damnation, it struck at the ancient world with epithets. "The later Roman poets were only decadent because the nineteenth century wanted them to be," an historian has written. Whatever is called decadent today receives the name as the result of a wish. For "decadence," the word, is an epithet, neither more nor less, and this should alert us at least to the possibility that there is nothing to which it actually and legitimately applies. A woman is not a "bitch," though we may call her one. Sexual offenders are not "fiends." Homosexuals are not "fruits" or "queers." The Chinese are not the "yellow peril."

"Decadence" is obviously not a noun of the order of "chair," but neither is it one of the order of "corruption," say, or "sadness" or even "perversion." As an adjective it has none of the types of existence of "refined" or "powerful" or "sensuous"; it offers only *reputed* physical

data on which to base its claim to actuality. Its existence is purely negative. It is a word chosen to fill a space. It emerges as the underside or logical complement of something else, coerced into taking its place in our vocabularies by the pressure of something that needs an opposite, an enemy. "Decadence" is a scarecrow, a bogey, a red herring.

The "positive" reality of which "decadence" is the shadowy obverse or complement is composed of all the standards and ideals by which societies have judged themselves and been judged, all the criteria and norms that have governed various aspects of public (and later private) existence, or that have been thought to govern them. These change throughout history, of course, but what has remained constant is the condition of mingled yearning and fear out of which something drastically and exemplarily "wrong" has been posited in order to buttress belief in, or at least adherence to, what is "right." Decadence has always been made to function as a presumed mode of behavior or action which stands as evidence of a withdrawal from normality; whether this results from weakness, ill will, bad faith or cunning decision, it is always the outcome of a fatal principle. Centrally, and beyond moral categories, decadence has been thought of as a type of regression, a falling away from others in their advance toward the future.

It will be obvious that this function of decadence as a category strongly resembles that of evil or sin in religious structurings of the world. Decadence has in fact usually been regarded as a type of evil, a peculiar, limited, ingrowing face of the bad.

In Catholic doctrine, for example, evil is, theologically, the absence or deprivation of the good; decadence, to say it once again, is the absence of or departure from certain norms. Yet there is a crucial difference, which is that the idea of decadence is inseparably bound to one particular value or criterion to which religion, theoretically at least, has been hostile or indifferent. That value is "progress." In more serious modes of thinking, decadence has historically been seen as the end of a line of progress, a reversion following upon an arrest.

This idea of decadence as the opposite or obverse of progress is a source of much of the mythology, both vulgar and elegant, that surrounds the word and keeps it in being as fashionable description. If "progress" is itself the most undeterminable and undemonstrable of words when used outside the area of physically measurable actions, if it is an arbitrary reality, a category of wishful human judgment and not a "truth," then to be linked with it as its dark complement, its opposi-

tional mode, as “decadence” is, means that the latter ought to be immediately suspect. But its very unreliability as an accurate descriptive makes it wonderfully available as an epithet. Together “progress” and “decadence” have moved through our language and our thought as poles between which lies a void.

If the ideas of progress and decadence are really two sides of an illusion, then their persistence is an illustration of the power of language and thought to keep the non-existent in imaginary existence. We accept such unreality, the “lying” action of metaphor, for example, when it operates in its proper spheres: the creation of fictions in the esthetic realm, one of whose purposes is to relieve us of the burden of the world’s facticity, its givenness; or in scientific explorations, where it functions in connection with hypotheses. The metaphors of fiction and poetry, of all the arts for that matter, are in the service of what might have been and might be, and have the effect of giving us, through this added dimension of possibility, a space in which to exist *otherwise*. The question then is not whether or not such metaphors are true but whether they are real, whether in fact they create such a space. (In science the question is whether or not metaphors do lead to the discovery of actualities, real processes or conditions.)

This is what Picasso meant when he called art “the lie that leads to truth.” But there is another type of lie or untruth in which existence is not added to, in order to create a new truth, or provisionally reshaped, in order to expose its secrets, but rather is wrongly seen. Here history and the present are subjected to an action of metaphor whose effect is to destroy their actuality, in the mind at any rate. The metaphors of art and of science recognize the actualities of the world and go beyond them; those of illusion replace the actualities with themselves. Both “progress” and “decadence,” the latter even more intractably, are metaphors that express both a wish that the world move one way or another and an assumption that it does.

In J. B. Bury’s *The Idea of Progress* there is the following confident assertion: “. . . every great civilization of the past progressed to a point at which instead of advancing further it stood still and declined, to become the prey of younger societies or, if it survived, to stagnate. Arrest, decadence, stagnation has been the rule.” In Oswald Spengler’s immodest tome, *The Decline of the West*, the notion is repeated, this time with the addition of that familiar image drawn from human chronology: “Every culture passes through the age-phases of the individual man. Each has its childhood, youth, manhood and old age.”

The trouble with such schemata, which have a recurring and apparently indestructible life in the mind, is that they are fictions of a particularly empty kind. As I have pointed out before, there is only the most dubious historical evidence that civilizations do grow old, stagnate, and die, and none at all for the belief that this occurs according to some iron law whose workings mirror the stages of an individual destiny. The Roman Empire did not grow old and die; it underwent assaults and transformations. The British Empire did not obey a principle of decadence; it lost strength and was finally dissolved through the operation of certain political and economic *facts*, none of which was inexorable.

What history appears to show instead of a law of decadence are the simultaneity of decline and advance ("There are no mere phenomena of decay; every decline is also a rise," R. W. Collingwood has written), and the potential convertibility of one form of human enterprise into another. The evidently powerful produces the secretly so; the appearance of weakness is discovered as actual strength, and the reverse; culture wanes in order to renew itself; empires "die" so that their parts may live; the immoral is the proof of the moral. There is an economy of the manifestations of human behavior and activity in the realm of values that might be compared to the principle of conservation of energy in the material world.

In light of this, the notion of decadence in societies and cultures can be seen to be injurious to the integrity and wholeness of communal experience. If there is a "falling away" from a standard it can mean that the standard is outworn, lifeless, or an obstacle to growth, which has been true in every period of innovation—at bottom a movement of renewal—in the arts and other human realms. If a once strong society has become weak or a once flourishing culture infertile, what is the point of describing the new condition as "decadent," since it describes itself? To add "decadence" to descriptions of human history is to perform at best an act of supererogation, at worst one of radical misunderstanding.

So much for decadence as a perspective upon civilizations, cultures and their fates. What remains to be said is something about the word in relation to the activities of particular human beings, its chief currency now.

The peculiar power of fashion is to coerce us into doing what we would not otherwise have done or thought of doing. Fashion arrives

like a wind from nowhere. The world of appearances or behavior recommends itself differently, new compulsions make themselves known, old habits are deprived of status. Once a fashion is under way, there is an irony behind its reign in every sphere, an irony of which we are unconscious except in hindsight: the imitative, the derivative appears as the original.

For the adamantly, the professionally fashionable, the “pace-setters,” new style seems an increment, something added to nature or creation, although its roots can always be found in another fashion, one that has been repudiated; fashions exist to undo one another. For the rest of us fashions always bring a disturbing emptiness, an absence of authentic choice (to be resolutely unfashionable is also to feel coerced); a gap is present between being and gesture. If we submit, we find ourselves carried along, acting in such and such a way or wearing such and such a garment because it is being done or worn; if we hold out, we find ourselves off-balance nevertheless, somehow jostled out of the way by time.

Caught up in a fashion, you experience an inability to determine—should you make the attempt—its true relation to yourself, since fashion is, by definition, what has been set in motion and maintained by *others*, what is meant by others. Fashion is also by definition the ephemeral masquerading as the permanent, the arbitrary as the inevitable. Fashion chooses rather than is chosen and imposes “truth” instead of allowing it to be determined.

All this is most evident in physical matters, in dress, decor, styles, in objects of various kinds—Tiffany lamps, Swedish modern, warm-up suits. When it comes to impalpable realities such as ideas or speech, the matter, naturally enough, becomes murky and complicated. Yet we all recognize that there are fashions in thought and expression that are every bit as imperious as those that rule in successive waves in the material world; there are temporary reigns of genres of consciousness, unstable but momentarily despotic systems of evaluation or interpretation. (There can even be a fashion of opposition to evaluation or interpretation.) Freudianism in its debased form (but of course all fashions of an intellectual kind are a debasement) has been a notable and flagrant example; Structuralism, or the Death of God, or the notion of Camp have been more subtle ones.

“Decadence” as a fashionable term is one of the subtlest and most elusive examples of all. Unlike Freudianism, or any body of thought or way of perception or interpretation that has a provenance in *somebody’s* mind, but rather like Camp, whose status as a fashionable word

has been a matter of assumptions and ascriptions that seemed to have emerged as the result of a conspiracy with no one at its head, decadence, as a word, a diagnosis, or, as has been prominent lately, a perverse honorific, has simply been found to be there, on every fashionable tongue, in every fashionable typewriter. And this is so despite the fact that nobody seems to know what decadence truly is, although vulgar and superficial theories of it abound and many phenomena are put forward as instances of its presence among us.

Yet such is the tyranny of fashion that we are all presumed to know perfectly well what is meant by the word in its current uses, all of us, that is, who are supposed to know what anything means. We are presumed to know that it denotes a fact or action or condition of the same order as a number of other aspects of human behavior at the fringe; we are expected to be able to distinguish it from other such actualities, the way we distinguish anomie, say, or sexual perversion or unorthodoxy of many other kinds.

One thing that makes this possible is that, unlike even Camp, which appeared to be something quite new in human history (those who employ the word most casually are generally unaware of its material roots in Regency England and its verbal ones in France), decadence is accepted as a recurring and universal phenomenon; we are simply in a new phase or phases of what has always been known, always bound sooner or later to display itself. This gives the word an apparent solidity, a seeming facticity such as "human potential" or "post-Christian" or the "new eroticism" can only pretend to. Being presumably historical, proven, decadence seems therefore to be free of the element of wishfulness that so evidently characterizes the other terms offered here as examples of intellectual fashion.

But a wish is there, even if it is a great deal more subtle and better masked. What is wanted, in all but some extreme and improbably eccentric cases, is not really the thing itself, whatever that might be. One can legitimately yearn for the end of Christianity or for a bisexual revolution as the advent of the body as source of redoubled pleasure, but to crave decadence would rightly be regarded as a pose, would be thought of in fact as a sign of decadence itself, the posturing quality of which has come to be one of its prominently regarded features. When Kenneth Tynan chats about decadence as though it were a charming native dance or jet-setters hold parties with a theme of "decadence," the testimony is only to falseness, pose, the inauthentic.

The desire, it seems likely, is for decadence to *exist*, to be present in one form or another, so that we can identify it or at least seem to and so

gain a measure of control or power through knowingness (a rather different matter from knowledge) over another perplexing aspect of the life of behavior and values; we want it to exist so that we can have an attitude toward it. And we want to have an attitude because such a stance implies superiority over fate; we become judges, we decide about the world.

The fashion consists, to begin with, in the assumption that "decadence" does exist; the word chosen to denote the thing is then employed as an approved instrument, a certified agency of meaning, on the basis of a sly consensus. Crucial to the success of this enterprise, this conspiracy to inject another unnecessary meaning into the world, is the blotting out of the word's history, which this work is an attempt to restore. If we knew what the word had experienced before we took it up, what vicissitudes and turns of fortune, what assaults and betrayals and what infections it had incurred, we would most likely drop it, as a tainted object. The truth is that we want the phenomenon of decadence to be historical, but not the word.

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Leon Botstein

GERMAN TERRORISM FROM AFAR

The kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro by the Italian "Red Brigade" terrorists temporarily dwarfed public interest in the phenomenon of terrorism in Germany. German terrorism, through the events of the fall of 1977, the kidnap-murder of Martin Schleyer, the hijacking of a Lufthansa plane to Magadishu, and its rescue, and last, the suicides of the terrorists in Stammheim prison, was the focus of intense international discussion well into the winter of 1978. Despite the turn of our attention to Italy, German terrorism continues to affect German politics and to mystify foreign observers. In the spring of 1978, four German terrorists were captured in Yugoslavia and, almost simultaneously, in June, significant anti-terrorist legislation was passed.

Anti-terrorist legislation in Germany and the prospect of further legislation, including proposals which would increase border and airport surveillance, telephone surveillance, and search and identification procedures, have been the focus of most foreign discussion. The anti-terrorist measures most recently passed by the West German parliament involved extension of the power to tap telephones and open mail. They also called for more stringent identification procedures in hotels and at campsites. Perhaps most ominous is the measure which allows judges to reject "manifestly superfluous" defense motions in trials of alleged terrorists. As Italian events show, such preventative measures against terrorism in a democracy with large cities may well be impossible to implement and perhaps illusory. Enactment of legislation purporting to prevent and locate terrorism can pose a direct threat to the maintenance of the civil liberties of a democracy and can play into one possible scheme of the terrorists and their sympathizers. Such restrictions of liberty and freedom could force democracy to shed a benign facade as a free and just system, and force it to display its genuinely harsh character, its support of gross social and economic inequality. Preventative measures of a repressive character might, in theory, enhance the attractiveness of radical political revolution among the citizenry.

A general concern for protecting democracy from both terrorism and an extreme reaction to it prevails in the cases of three nations—Italy, Germany, and Japan—where contemporary democracies emerged after popular fascism and are seen as relatively fragile when compared to the older democracies of the United States, Great Britain or France. Of these three, the significance of terrorism and the reaction to it in the case of West Germany is particularly fascinating.

Right after the acts of terror in the fall of 1977, the official reaction of the West German government was the subject of considerable journalistic fascination in Western Europe and America. Key elements in the French press, notably *Le Monde*, criticized the German government's reaction to the wave of terrorism and expressed a perhaps widespread concern that the West German cure for terrorism—more efficient police controls, greater restrictions on civil liberties—were uncomfortably reminiscent of Germany before 1945. The French criticism in early November was significant enough to warrant a special interview, replete with assurances, with Chancellor Helmut Schmidt on French television. A Dutch journalist, writing in *The New York Times* shortly thereafter, sought to draw attention to "the official craze for *Ordnung*" and the trends towards "repression" current in West Germany, and warned that the response to terrorism might not reflect a much-needed sobriety and moderation, and threaten democracy. His letter represented well the nature of foreign concern regarding German terrorism. Terrorism in its German expression raises the spectre of the past.

In May 1977 a correspondent in the British *The Guardian* voiced his hope that Germany, in reacting to terrorism, would not "slide once more down the slippery old slope," towards the arbitrary use of power and authority characteristic of the German past. German terrorism and the official German response to it have developed into a public test case on the question of how real, how profound, and how permanent democracy has become in a nation which less than fifty years ago embraced nazism.

Terrorism, whatever its origin and location, has fascinated and mystified observers. Recent books, such as Albert Parry's *Terrorism: From Robespierre to Arafat* and Walter Laqueur's *Terrorism* have appeared. In the affluent West, the interest in newspapers and television has focussed on the personalities of German terrorists, on the fact that they come mostly from prosperous middle-class families, and on the possibility that their behavior may be symptomatic of the decline of Western democracy in general. The older generation is mystified, for it cannot discern sympathetic traditional ideals of either left or right in

the actions of terrorists from many Western countries, especially in Italy and Germany. The young age of most of the terrorists, they fear, is itself a clue to a more general malaise among young people today. Consequently, any dismissal of terrorism as merely the work of a pathological few does not seem to suffice and does not assuage the anxiety in the West concerning terrorism.

The foreign reaction to German terrorism takes on a special character because Germans are regarded as historically linked to terror, violence, and repressive authoritarianism. The intense interest in the Bonn government's actions comes from those Western nations who twice in the twentieth century were victors over Germany, first against what was viewed as aggressive monarchical authoritarianism (Wilhelminian Germany) and then its brutal fascist successor (nazism). A caricature of the German personality persists in these countries, fueled especially through popular culture, in television and movie scripts: an image of the German as fanatic, efficient, repressed, clean, and as proficient in science and scholarship as in terror and murder. Consequently, the German terrorists are open to particular suspicion not applicable, for example, to Palestinian or Molluccan terrorists. The reaction to the German rescuers was not comparable to that accorded the Israeli elite troops who staged the raid at Entebbe. A film, comparable to the one on Entebbe, based on the German rescue at Mogadishu is probably not now in preparation either in America or in Europe.

Such suspicion is heightened by the fact that most of the non-German terrorists appear to operate within a familiar and understandable tradition of political terrorism. The Palestinians are fighting, presumably, a national struggle, as are the Molluccans, Irish, and Puerto Ricans. Latin American and Spanish terrorists have been viewed as attacking right-wing dictatorships, imperialism, and monopoly capitalism all at once. The Italians might be seen as fighting within a classic context of class conflict. In contrast, what motivates the German terrorists appears incomprehensible. That fact has not escaped Chancellor Schmidt, who has done his best to link the German terrorist to a general international problem in the West among the young, so as to discredit the impression that German terrorism is specifically a German problem. "Terrorism is not specifically a German phenomenon," he argued, linking it to Irish and Spanish terrorism and to an American experience—what he describes as "the terrible moral collapse at the end of the sixties in the U.S."

Is German terrorism in fact more than a German example of an international problem? Ironically, although most of the foreign con-

cern for a political relapse in Germany away from democracy is directed at the government, perhaps the concern for the future of German democracy might be better directed at the particular significance and origin of the behavior of the German terrorists themselves.

Unlike fellow terrorists from nations where national liberation or revolution against tyranny is at stake, recent German terrorists have demonstrated little in the way of ideology. Their political slogans are anti-imperialist, anti-bourgeois, anti-capitalist, and pro-Third World, but these slogans fail to explain the use of terror as a political tactic, and as part of a coherent movement. In fact, despite radical left rhetoric, the Baader-Meinhof gang and its tactics have been repudiated by both the pro-Moscow German Communist party and the pro-Peking Communist party of Germany. The latter, in the weekly *Röte Fahne*, identified the terrorists as contemptuous of the working class and distinct from the tradition of radical terrorism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Indeed, the terrorists themselves reject the classic identification with a working class of a particular nation, particularly their own. They concede their inability to arouse mass support within Germany. Despite the fact that the rapid growth, the economic miracle of Germany, is past, and "severe economic strain" is alleged (to quote writer Andrew Kopkind), economic deprivation and the general economic conditions in Germany cannot be compared to Italy's and appear insufficient as an explanation for the terrorism. The German terrorists' is an international struggle, one which rejects national identification and seeks to somehow galvanize all the oppressed, whether in the Middle East, Latin America, or Asia. Horst Mahler, a lawyer for the Baader-Meinhof terrorists, was quoted as admitting that the working classes could not liberate themselves and that the German terrorists did not "feel German" any more and felt more like "a fifth column of the Third World."

Along with the absence of a coherent political credo and the desire for an international sphere of activity, the quality of intense loyalty among the Baader-Meinhof German terrorists, one to another, must be considered. The deaths of four terrorists in prison, which appear to have been suicides, (immediately after the Mogadishu rescue) were perhaps the most mystifying of the actions of the terrorists in the eyes of the outside world. The continuing suspicion that these deaths were not suicides but illegal murders by the Bonn Government or prison authorities overlooks the plausibility of suicide as an act consistent with the general behavior of the terrorists. The first suicides were in

direct response to the news of the failed hijacking and the deaths of their comrades in the Mogadishu raid. Subsequent terrorist threats, issued soon thereafter, in early November, to blow up Lufthansa planes, were all couched in terms not of political struggle but of revenge: "For each assassinated comrade, we shall blow up a Lufthansa plane in flight." The suicides and these threats reflect the presence of a small clique of movement adherents fanatically bound to one another, as opposed to a small clique of committed revolutionaries whose objectives are the shared desire to bring about a moment of future triumph in history. It is as though the most important thing to the terrorists is not their shared goal, but rather their bond, their relationship, their membership in a group. Their acts are, in some measure, merely public declarations of their membership and solidarity and not actions in pursuit of a political goal. In contrast, imprisoned terrorists and radicals of the past have contemplated escape and endured jail sentences in order to further carry on a struggle, especially in the memory of fallen comrades.

When one considers this deep interpersonal loyalty to the movement, the internationalism, and the lack of a coherent political stance together with the particular acts of terror committed by German terrorists, a picture frighteningly reminiscent of early Nazi party members emerges. The allegiance to movement over ideals, to the glorification of personal sacrifice, the contempt of nationalism and the aggressive urge for international success and domination were characteristic of the Nazis. Even Nazi racial theories had no firm end point, for beyond Jews there were Slavs and then others. The process of terror and violence, rather than the achievement of a stable political order, were, for the Nazis, ends in themselves. When one considers the victims of recent German terrorist acts in the context of terrorist internationalism and movement loyalty (at the expense of self-interest or even survival), even stronger parallels emerge. The choice of airplane passengers as victims and future victims recapitulates the unpredictable and international nature of Nazi terror, its treatment of life as superfluous, and its penchant for, by otherwise reasonable political standards, "innocent" victims. The contemporary German terrorist, by engaging in comparable terror with comparable group and political characteristics, re-enacts a form of extreme alienation from German society and democracy perhaps revealingly comparable to the behavior of many early fascists and Nazis in the 1920s and 1930s.

If terrorism, in general, has a rationale, one aspect is the dramatization of a cause to the world, as was the case with the quite odd

airplane hijacking by Croats which took place in the spring of 1977. The world became aware once again that modern Yugoslavia is, comparatively speaking, an artificial national construction (as its name implies) which masks a long history of ethnic heterogeneity and frustrated national aspirations. The case of the German terrorist, the seemingly senseless suicides of comrades, and the continuing threats to blow up planes full of innocent victims in order to "commemorate" their comrades can hardly be classed with those acts of terrorism whose audience is the world, and whose goal possesses some recognizable national or international relevance.

In fact, one seemingly consistent objective of today's German terrorists is, like the Nazis', the psychological impact of terror on innocent people. As Horst Mahler argued, the terrorists aim to frighten the majority of people, who, unfortunately, continue to rely on society as it now exists. Through fear and individual acts of violence, they seek to destroy the status quo without significant support. This attitude reminds one of a passage from a pro-Nazi play, Johst's *Schlageter*, first performed on Hitler's birthday in 1933 and quoted in Walter Laqueur's *Terrorism*. The protagonist states that the absence of mass support for individual acts of violent terror is of no consequence, for if the alternative for the future is society essentially unchanged or a society turned by individual violence into a cemetery, a "decent cemetery" is preferable. To pursue the analogy with the Nazis, the German terrorists embrace direct personal violence with relish (as the murder at point blank range of industrialist Jürgen Ponto, the solicitor general of Germany in his car; the shooting of Martin Schleyer and four bodyguards; and the seemingly senseless shooting of the Lufthansa pilot at Mogadishu all indicate) and are uninhibited by "respectable" moral standards of behavior. Like the Nazis, they have contempt for them as bourgeois and decadent. A late November 1977 statement from the Baader-Meinhof group is couched in such terms, terms convincingly comparable to Nazi propaganda and justifications: "... our objections will now be capitalist profiteers and their lackeys. We shall blow them up in flight when our target is there. We shall act everywhere, in tearooms frequented by their painted women, in select clubs, luxury movie houses, at galas, premières and in places of high finance." As with the Nazis, the inspiration to terror is drawn from a "decadent" culture (the early German fascists spoke of a "doomed bourgeois society"); as with the Nazis, the prospective victims cannot really be identified, for the categories ("their lackeys") and qualities of potential victims are ever expanding and continue to justify the presence of

violent terror. The Baader-Meinhof group is reminiscent, despite its left-wing rhetoric, not of the traditional terrorism of anarchism, of the far left but rather of a past terrorism from the far right, during and after the seizure of power by the Nazis in 1933.

Despite these parallels, the world regards the German terrorists, the Baader-Meinhof adherents and their sympathizers (whom *New York Times* correspondent Flora Lewis estimates as marginal, even though 20 percent of German students might fall into the category of the militant leftist), as examples of left-wing extremism. Melvin Lasky's article "Voyage among the 'Ugly Germans'" which is sympathetic to the German government (*Encounter*, November 1977) is typical. Lasky takes up the defense of the official Germany and uses the fact of German terrorism, despite disclaimers by key liberals and leftists of support of Baader-Meinhof, to castigate and discredit all those who view the right and far right as the threats to German democracy and who also condone the allegedly benign activity and attitudes of the left toward the German government. For Lasky, the "neo-Marxian left," in all its forms, is part of a direct continuum which leads to Baader-Meinhof behavior. Indeed, it is certain that the terrorists present themselves this way. But how, then, is the striking parallel with the Nazis to be explained, if the terrorists' actions have pretensions to any symbolic public meaning from their own point of view? After all, the kidnapping and murder of two prominent members of Germany's financial elite could be acts intended to dramatize and threaten monopoly capitalism. The answer lies in the fact that the German terrorists act consciously as if there had been no German past, no history from which they emerged. Unlike any other terrorists active today, the German terrorist operates in an ideological and historical vacuum, entirely in the present, without past and perhaps without future. The Palestinian, the Irish, the Spanish, and the Puerto Rican terrorists all operate from an interpretation of the past which contains some vision of the future, however deranged, bizarre, or self-contradictory. As so symbolically expressed in the scene, (if exaggerated, certainly plausible) in the Entebbe hijacking where a young German terrorist kept a gun pointed at an innocent group of Jews, the German terrorists, given their leftist pretenses, operate as if oblivious of their own national past and its international significance. Unconsciously, despite the appearance of left radicalism, the German terrorists replay the most frightening alienated behavior from their national past, the behavior of the Nazi elite, both of the S.A. and S.S. They reenact in 1977, with new

slogans, the same hostility and destructive ambition of rightist German counterparts from the 1920s and 1930s.

The responses of the Bonn government to this terrorism, the object of international liberal concern, are, in contrast, directly in the shadow of a German past, and reflect an historically conscious desire to avoid the mistakes of the Weimar Republic, the only democratic antecedent to West Germany. The Weimar Republic was undermined by terrorism from the very start. The right wing *Freikorps* (Free Corps) engaged in terrorism in the early twenties. Two key radical figures, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, were assassinated, as were two prominent essentially centrist politicians identified with the Weimar Republic, Matthias Erzberger and Walter Rathenau. One of the common explanations for the chaos and disintegration of the Republic is that the terrorists, primarily from the right, were treated too leniently and were tacitly, if not openly, supported by judges and political parties. The toleration of anti-republican terrorism became a respectable means of opposing the Republic among non-terrorists. The absence of law, of respect for the legal structures of the Weimar democracy, and the failure to engage in just and firm applications of the law are considered causes for the collapse of that democratic initiative. Curiously, the assassins of Rathenau were similar to the Baader-Meinhof members in their obsession with the act of terror rather than its end.

In any event, the contemporary official German reaction can be understood as a replay in which today's officials are systematically avoiding the errors of a first run-through. Law will be enforced. Terrorism will be decisively dealt with. The instruments of force will be used to protect the legal structure and stability of West Germany. As the Minister of Justice Hans Jochen Vogel said on his trip to the United States, right after the Mogadishu rescue, "The Federal Republic is so stable that it can withstand all assaults; and so long as a nation based on law remains—one that energetically takes action when it is necessary to do so without deviating one iota from its democratic principles—then the nation is not in any danger."

This posture toward the future of democracy in Germany, one which is defensive as a result of the interpretation of the past, one which is determined to avoid past errors, despite foreign criticism and concern, is one which seeks to break the pattern of twentieth-century German history. Ironically, the terrorists, who have not been regarded as throwbacks, appear oblivious to the reality and symbolism of this very same past. The disregard of many foreign observers for the

relationship of the past to West Germany's current policies reflects a shallow understanding of the problem of democracy in Germany. As scholars such as the late Freidrich Meinecke (the dean of this century's German historians) and George Lichtheim have argued, the difficulty experienced in grafting Anglo-American or French ideals of democracy onto German soil derives initially from the shift in Germany during the last century away from the liberal and universal ideals of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment upon which American and French democratic ideals, if not practices, are founded. This shift, which dates from the early nineteenth century, constitutes the historic failure of Western liberalism in nineteenth-century Germany. In the context of this tradition, the history of "Blood and Iron" pre-World War I Germany and the Nazi era place a burden upon contemporary democratic Germany, which is not understood by today's journalists and their readers. When Justice Minister Vogel spoke of a nation of law (*Rechtsstaat*) his words were not carelessly chosen. They point away from the particularly German political theory and practice of the past two hundred years toward Western European and American models. They embody the Bonn government's view of the central problem of German history, the failure of Germany before World War II to steer its historical development away from a nation based on might (*Machtstaat*) or on nationalism (*Nationalstaat*). Bonn appears determined that terrorism will not undermine what it considers the Federal Republic to be: a democratic nation of law in the Western tradition. As one conservative deputy in the German parliament put it, German terrorism has cast the spectre, in part, of the collapse of Weimar Germany: "We have been reminded again how quickly and dangerously an apparently stable society can explode." A young German, writing to *The New York Times* in January 1978, claimed, "After 1945, the democratically governed part of Germany finally overcame that old-age divergence from the West, which culminated in nazism. The terrorists will not succeed in bombing Germany back into the political Stone Age."

Interpretation of one past, if not an obsession with it, helps explain the posture of the German government toward terrorism. The absence of any overt recognition of a different past illuminates the origin and meaning of German terrorism. The German terrorist of the Baader-Meinhof gang is an extreme symptom of a society which, since World War II, continues to inadequately absorb and deal with its history. The German terrorists' marked disregard for mass support, for any symbolic value in terrorist behavior, not to speak of the violence

and quality of their terror, permit not only facile parallels with Nazi terror. The historical amnesia of the terrorist also explains the difference between the German terrorist and comparable counterparts in other Western nations. One useful case in point, especially for the American, is apparent when one compares the German terrorists with their closest American counterparts, the radicals of the late 1960s and early 1970s, many of whom resorted to violence. Clearly, the German terrorist of middle-class origin and the American middle-class radical are not equivalents, but the contrasts themselves, no matter how enormous, illuminate the meaning of German terrorism.

A general contrast between German and American middle-class radicalism has been a topic of interest ever since the late 1960s. Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas, both distinguished political philosophers, had occasion in 1967 to make a comparison as observers of student movements in both countries. Habermas saw a basic commonality between the two radical movements. The German student radical of 1967 was one "whose memory is not determined by the Nazi period," whose experience was exclusively with affluence and a stable post-World War II political order. Their lives were therefore comparable to those of American students. A main source of political discontent for both, apart from specifically student-related issues, Habermas argued, was the discrepancy between rhetoric and reality, between the ideals and potential of the industrialized Western democracies, and the oppression and poverty of masses in the world. The ideals of equality, freedom and prosperity explicit in democracy contrasted with real conditions in the world; the promise of science and technology with its abuse against humanity. Habermas saw the student protest of a decade ago in both nations as evidence of "outrage against the double standards of the older generation's morality."

Habermas' analysis holds true when one considers the behavior of American radicals. Their outrage was directed against a stable democracy in America which tolerated a compromise in domestic social conditions, and which, abroad, maintained a foreign policy which cast severe doubt on the credibility of the rhetoric of democracy and consequently on the appeal of the society itself. Poverty and racism in America and the Vietnam War evoked rage and resistance. However, the violence they bred was never comparable to today's terrorism. Most of the radical violence in the late 1960s and early 1970s was directed at property, at symbolic objects—draft cards, files, buildings, flags. If people lost their lives, as they did, it was not the explicit object. The personal violence of assassination in America, as well as phenomena

such as the Manson family, were not part of extreme left political action such as the Weathermen. Rather, those who acted under slogans bearing even remote resemblance to current Baader-Meinhof rhetoric used violence in America always with a curious self-restraint. The S.L.A. kidnapping of Patricia Hearst had, in a bizarre context, the redistribution of wealth as an immediate object. The Santa Barbara bank bombing, the deaths of S.L.A. members, the Wisconsin and West 11th Street explosions, are not the equivalents of the kidnapping and murders, let alone the hijacking of innocent passengers, which have been part of the Baader-Meinhof efforts since the early 1970s.

This distinction between political violence, which is symbolic in character and directed primarily at property and not individuals or groups, and which steps back, insofar as is possible, from face-to-face killing and the terrorism of large innocent groups is not meant to legitimate American radical actions. Rather, the self-restraint of American radical action in the past decade when compared with current German terrorist behavior reflects differences in the prevailing tradition and understanding of history in the two countries shared even by the extremist fringes of the population.

Political violence in America, surely a significant phenomenon, has remained within the framework of a conservative democracy. Historian Richard Hofstadter, in his essay "Reflections on Violence in the United States," characterized America's conservative working class, its societal resilience, and its pragmatic resistance to those apocalyptic visions of the future which breed successful revolutions. As the waning of American radicalism in the late 1970s has demonstrated, the violence of the last decade remained within a traditional pattern of political action in American history, a history which includes violence—industrial, racial, economic, anarchic, governmental. The containment of political violence over the past decade within the tradition of American non-revolutionary politics was not only the result of governmental repressions, organizational weakness, and lack of support among the radicals. It was also the result of demonstrable self-control within the radical movement in the use of violent means.

Herbert Marcuse, in 1967, contrasted American radicals with their European counterparts and described the American's reluctance to engage in violence in the cause of revolution. He described one Berkeley demonstration which voluntarily stepped back from a bloody encounter. He recognized a tradition of non-violent civil disobedience and the tendency to engage in political action within the boundary of the concept of legality. This behavior is evidence of how profoundly

the faith in democratic politics, in a myth of American political process which includes a distaste for widespread citizen terror and violence, has penetrated, even to the most dissident elements. This faith is symbolic of the persistent ideal of a "nation of laws," the particularly Western "*Rechtsstaat*" Justice Minister Vogel described as Germany's contemporary ideal.

This self-restraint among political radicals in America has its roots in the fact that the outrage which Habermas sees as directed against the "double standard of the older generation's morality" is based on a clear understanding of that older generation and a corresponding confidence among the radicals in their own grasp of American history. The young American radical, the exemplar of the much discussed "generation gap" and the subject of extensive psychological and sociological inquiry in the 1960s, comprehended the older generation and was confident that the values of that generation were actually those openly held by the older generation and genuinely adhered to. The older generation consequently was the subject of contempt, hate and ridicule, but never serious doubt. The older generation, even at the height of American radicalism, never wavered from its praise of the compromise implicit in democracy, from its pragmatic if not phlegmatic assertion that radical ideals are utopian and unrealistic, that poverty and injustice are endemic and not subject to elimination, only slow amelioration. The preaching to accept second bests, personal prosperity, a less than perfect future, a persistent double standard within democracy between potential and reality, outraged the young, but cemented the young's confidence that their perception of the older generation was accurate. The double standard and tolerant compromise advocated by their elders was real and was part of a tradition clearly within the national history of school textbooks, family lore, and, most of all, verifiable fact and observable behavior.

American radicals, despite painful alienation from parents and an older generation, were never *mystified*, in the political sense, by parents and grandparents. They grew up without blank spots concerning the past, without major mysterious political moments in personal family history or national history. Their elders, whether politicians or private citizens, were proud precisely of those values which the younger generation despised. The acknowledgement of a commonly understood tradition kept the difference between the radical young and the older generation from possessing a true revolutionary character. Political dissent, despite its violence, remained a matter of degree for the American radicals. They absorbed and reflected in their action the

American historical myth that time, evolution, and some form of democracy (consider, for example, the name S.D.S., Students for a Democratic Society) would narrow the distance between promise and reality in the ideals of justice, equality, freedom and prosperity. Only the rapidity of that process was ultimately at stake.

The German student radical in 1967 did not, and the German middle-class terrorist today does not possess such a secure historical tradition and backdrop. While Habermas is correct in the narrow sense that the German radical of the late 1960s never possessed direct memory of nazism, the failure of serious remembrance to take the place of memory in the minds of young Germans helps explain the phenomenon of terrorism. The striking patricidal character of the killing of Jürgen Ponto by Susanne Albrecht, a German terrorist, is symbolic of the impact of the difference in the historical memory and tradition behind radical violence in America and Germany. Susanne Albrecht was the goddaughter of industrialist Jürgen Ponto, from a socially equal family; she gained access to his house with flowers on the premise of a friendly dropping-by; he was shot at pointblank range. He was of an age comparable to her father and like him had had political conversations with her in the past. Ponto's killing is a typical indicator of the qualitative difference in young German terrorist response, in their "outrage" at the older generation's suspect standards and values. Curiously, Habermas himself predicted in 1969 that the kind of violent behavior demonstrated by the Baader-Meinhof terrorists, neo-anarchism, which seeks to demoralize people, to generate discontent by "psychically induced conflicts," such as kidnapping and hijacking, might grow out of the radical political movement in Germany.

What the German terrorist sees is an older generation now in power in West Germany attempting to provide the stability, the prosperity from which American-style democracy and its attendant rhetoric of evolution, reason and compromise can easily emerge. Those in power in finance and government act and speak like their American counterparts, urging gradual change, conceding the imperfections of the world, urging tolerance and moderation, preaching the virtues of law, of a brokered, perhaps less than always honest process of government in the name of a democratic tradition. Yet, the German older generation, unlike its American counterpart, is, like the young in Germany, only at the starting line of democracy. For the young German, the years behind that starting line, before 1945, are a dark abyss. They realize, in some vague fashion, that precisely those now preaching the virtues of democracy were participant somehow with a

government of drastically different values and habits. That horrible past has never been adequately addressed either in the home or in the school. Mystery and secrecy regarding the past, assertions of collective guilt notwithstanding, make the hand of the past more potent than it might otherwise be.

In the height of the wave of terrorism in October, Jacob Neusner, the distinguished scholar from Brown University, visited Tuebingen on the occasion of the five-hundredth anniversary of the founding of that city's university. Neusner was struck during his visit that "the bad memories of their (the Germans') country's history are not to be mentioned." In the official ceremonies and throughout his visit to Germany, Neusner was struck by the fact that, especially among the older generation, no real discussion of the past took place, so that in any meaningful sense "no history can be brought to speech." It is perhaps significant that the recent wave of terrorism coincides with the appearance of an apolitical revisionist interpretation of Hitler and the current disturbing, seemingly uncritical ahistorical fascination with Hitler now visible in West Germany, phenomena ominously criticized in the news magazine *Der Spiegel* and the newspaper *Die Zeit*. While the *Frankfurter Zeitung* dismissed the significance of the recent revival of interest in Hitler, it and other media continue to examine the question, "Is there a Hitler craze?"

The willingness of the older generation in the Federal Republic to openly tolerate, in the name of democracy, a less than perfect society, and to urge respect for the law is therefore subject to an extreme personal mistrust incomprehensible to the American. The glib radical assertion that democratic values and ideals in the face of a less than utopian world are nothing but the rationalizations of autocratic imperialists who seek only power and domination is made all the more believable by the fact that German history makes that view plausible in a personal way for most German households, most German politicians, and most Germans over forty-five years of age.

The disclosure, after the recent kidnapping of Martin Schleyer, apparently a well-respected German business executive, that he had been a prominent S.S. officer in Prague only confirms the mistrust, the suspicion that those in power who urge the tenets of democratic faith are not real, are not fundamentally benign, are not even unapologetic and corrupt hypocrites, but rather desperately evil magicians, wolves in sheep's clothing. Since the American radical's perception of the older generation's national history can be easily confirmed, the older generation needs only to be cast aside, albeit with force. For the German

terrorist, the sense that these same men perhaps served quite different ideals only some years earlier might legitimate their violent elimination. Face-to-face shooting and patricidal murder become elevated to acts of essential purgation, acts forcing off the mask of democratic reasonableness from incorrigible authoritarian monsters. Consequently, German terrorists are given to assassination and profound violent doubt about the integrity and value of human life. They mistrust the authenticity of their own human environment. The American radical questions the superiority of the father in a manner and to a degree quite significantly apart from his German counterpart (despite Erik Erikson's effort in 1970 to consider radicalism in an internationally valid psychological manner). The American concedes that his parents, and their parents before them, perhaps the entire American political tradition (although deliberately compromised in the name of democracy), have been neither radically good nor radically evil. The German faces parents making comparable claims, without either children or parents dealing effectively with far more devastating events of history, especially of the recent past. Consequently, the young German is not so sure that the parents are *not* radically evil, without knowing why. It is perhaps significant that Japan, a nation which began democracy at the same time as Germany, after a comparable authoritarian history, has its international Baader-Meinhof-style terrorists who have pursued similar patterns of violent terror, kidnapping, hijacking, and assassination.

Perhaps the most substantial support for this thesis comes from Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's masterful psycho-analytic study of postwar Germany, *The Inability to Mourn*, published in German in 1967 and in English in 1975. Using their own "spontaneous observation" and case histories of Germans who lived through the war, the Mitscherlichs noted a continuing effort by Germans to deny the Nazi past. They view Germans as not having dealt with the roots of "an ossifying German national egotism." Germans after 1945 have avoided the key issues of basic political rights. Instead, their concern has been economic, for the swift postwar recovery in which affluence cast an illusion of normalcy over a nation that established a democracy not by a political process but as a result of military defeat and edict by the victors. Germany, neither through legal nor educational means, has ever dealt with its terrifying past. The Mitscherlichs provide supportive psychoanalytic insights—the obsessive blaming of Hitler, the de-realization of the past, a continuing defense against mourning, and mass melancholia. They identify a political indifference, isolation, and

a mechanical allegiance to democracy in the context of an unresolved national past. This forms the context for the young Germans of the age of the terrorists.

The Mitscherlichs' perceptions from the 1960s are validated for the terrorist by Frederick Weibgen's eloquent "Op-Ed" piece in *The New York Times* (January 1978), "Compensating for a Childhood in Germany." He claims that his youth and schooling bred a peculiar mistrust, hatred and fear of the older generation as a result of the unresolved Nazi past. This experience is in contrast to the intergenerational dynamics experienced by American activists and radicals. As Weibgen put it, the postwar symbols of affluence "struck us as an obscene reward for obscene practices and added to the shame we felt . . . how could I trust my parents . . . trust my teachers?" Terrorists were fighting against parents who, as in Weibgen's own case "so recently exchanged the black of the S.S. uniform for the business executive's suit"; against "evil" itself, "and you don't fight fire other than with fire."

German terrorism, then, is an extreme symptom of the difficulties encountered in transplanting American and Western democratic ideals onto a nation with not only a radically different tradition but, more important, an unresolved, misunderstood and concealed past. The young middle-class, Baader-Meinhof-style terrorist reflects three crucial problems for German democracy: 1) that prosperity alone is insufficient as the basis for a stable democracy; 2) that an open, cold, and full exploration of the past (to an extent and an interpretative subtlety not undertaken since World War II) should be a continuing part of a new German generation's process of education and personal development; and 3) that the alienation of the young from democracy, an alienation which, in the case of the terrorists, is comparable to the alienation of the early Nazis from the Weimar Republic in style and substance, cannot be prevented by strict laws, enforcement, and the mere assertion of democratic principles. What appears lacking is an open confrontation with the historical differences that today's Germany inherited, a confrontation which might lead to an integration of the rhetoric and ideas of democracy into the fact of German history and the Nazi past.

In 1947, when Karl Jaspers presented his lectures entitled *The Question of German Guilt*, he identified the mistrust of the young stemming from the past as a key problem for the future of Germany. He provided a perceptive analysis of how Germans could deal with their past without falling into deceptive traps—facile repentance, easy

recriminations, accusations, and self-abasement. He urged a German as well as a global framework for a full public consideration of the Nazi past, one which would transcend the categories of victors and vanquished. Jaspers' protégé, the late Hannah Arendt, when she accepted the Lessing Prize in Hamburg in 1958, came back to Jaspers' plea when she called on her audience to acknowledge and comprehend, with immutable coldness, the historical past; to live with it and transcend it with remembrance for the sake of the future, not to hide or denature it of its stark reality. She thought that such candor with the past was a key to realizing democracy, the humanity and friendship within the human community. As Jaspers had put it, "our human dignity obliges us" to realize the democracy of the German present out of the national and personal past of German citizenry.

The phenomenon of German terrorism should be viewed as a pathological version of this wider German national problem. Terrorism should inspire Germany to take up once more a serious encounter with its past, in schools and in the home. Precisely for the sake of German democracy, no group of young Germans, no matter how small in number, should be permitted to re-enact the past and yet delude themselves by their ostensibly different idealism and self-righteous, antifascist principles; for they regress into the inhuman habits of the German past which obliterate the innocent and treat human life as superfluous. However, it is easy for those of us who are Jews and Americans merely to reflect and recommend. The difficulty and pain of addressing the German past for Germans in the name of future democracy cannot really be appreciated by those of us who are outside, whose identity in society is allied with the victims and the liberators of the German past.

Marshall Berman

BAUDELAIRE: MODERNISM IN THE STREETS

In the years since the Second World War, many scholars and thinkers have tried to understand what it means to be modern. Unfortunately, their energies have been fragmented in ways that virtually guarantee that they will not succeed. Modernity has been broken up into material and spiritual entities: “modernism,” a species of pure spirit, evolving in accord with its own artistic and intellectual imperatives; and “modernization,” a complex of material structures and processes—political, economic, social—that, once it has got under way, runs on its own momentum with little or no input from human minds or souls. This intellectual dualism, pervasive in contemporary culture, cuts our searchers off from one of the basic facts of modern life: the interfusion of its material and spiritual forces, the intimate unity of the modern self and the modern environment. The first great wave of writers and thinkers about modernity—Goethe, Hegel and Marx, Stendhal and Baudelaire, Carlyle and Dickens, Herzen and Dostoevsky—had an instinctive feeling for this unity; it gave their visions a complexity and depth that contemporary writing about modernity lacks.

Baudelaire did more than anyone in the nineteenth century to make the men and women of his century aware of themselves as moderns. He experienced modernity as a basis for self-definition, a categorical imperative for thought and action. Paul Verlaine, in a tribute written shortly before Baudelaire’s death, and Theodore de Banville at his graveside, portrayed him as the first full-fledged, self-conscious modernist, and claimed that his modernity was the primary source of his originality and greatness. But they were aware, as serious readers of Baudelaire still are, that his vision of the modern is full of inner tensions and ambiguities. Sometimes, especially in his great essays on “The Heroism of Modern Life” (1846) and “The Painter of Modern Life” (1859–60), he embraced modernity with great ardor, celebrated its tempo, its fashion and design, its science and technology,

its democratic and revolutionary drives; he portrayed everyday life in the modern world as an heroic adventure, and posited a modern sensibility as the *sine qua non* for creativity in the arts. At other points in his life he loathed and denounced everything modern, and demanded a rejection of modernity, a total rebellion against it, as the condition for any authentic life or art. I want to show here how many of the contradictions in Baudelaire's modernism grow out of his grasp of real contradictions that permeate the whole of modern material and spiritual life.

Baudelaire is universally recognized as one of the great urban writers. In all his writing, the city of Paris plays a principle role in the spiritual drama. In this, Baudelaire belongs to a great tradition of Parisian writing that reaches back to Villon, runs through Montesquieu and Diderot, Mercier and Restif, and into the nineteenth century with Balzac and Hugo and Eugène Sue. But Baudelaire also represents a radical break in this tradition. For he lived and worked in the midst of the radical transformation of the city itself. His most serious writing about Paris belongs to the late 1850s and the early 1860s, when, under the authority of Napoleon III and the direction of Baron Haussmann, the city was being systematically torn apart and rebuilt. Even as Baudelaire worked in Paris, the work of its modernization was going on under his feet and around his head. He saw himself not only as a spectator but as a participant and a protagonist in this ongoing work; his own Parisian work expresses its drama and trauma. Baudelaire shows us something that no other writer sees so well: how the modernization of the city at once inspires and enforces the modernization of its citizens' souls.

Two of Baudelaire's late prose poems, "The Eyes of the Poor" (1864) and "Loss of a Halo" (1865), bring this drama to life. These poems are part of a series that he wrote in the last decade of his life and planned to bring together under the title of *Spleen de Paris*. Baudelaire did not live to finish the series or publish it, but he did complete fifty of these poems, plus a preface and an epilogue, and they appeared as a unity in 1868, a year after his death. Walter Benjamin, in his series of remarkable essays on Baudelaire and Paris (now collected and translated in England as *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*), was the first to grasp the great depth and richness of these prose poems: all my work is in the vein he opened up, though I have found different elements and compounds from the ones he brought out. What I have found in these poems is a remarkable

metabolic and dialectical flow between the modern city and the modern self.

In the Preface to *Paris Spleen*, Baudelaire proclaims that “modern life,” *la vie moderne*, requires a new language: “a poetic prose, musical without rhythm and without rhyme, supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the soul’s lyrical impulses, the undulations of reverie, the leaps and jolts of consciousness (*soubresauts de conscience*).” He emphasizes that “it was above all from the exploration of enormous cities and from the convergence of their innumerable connections [*du croisement de leurs innombrables rapports*] that this obsessive ideal was born.” What Baudelaire communicates in this language, above all, is a series of what I will call primal modern scenes: experiences that arise from the concrete everyday life of Bonaparte’s and Haussmann’s Paris but carry a mythic resonance and depth that propel them beyond their place and time and transform them into archetypes of modern life.

THE FAMILY OF EYES

Our first primal scene emerges in “The Eyes of the Poor” (*Paris Spleen* #26). This poem takes the form of a lover’s complaint: the narrator is explaining to the woman he loves why he feels distant and bitter toward her. He reminds her of an experience they recently shared. It was the evening of a long and lovely day that they had spent alone together. They sat down on the terrace “in front of a new cafe that formed the corner of a new boulevard.” The boulevard was “still littered with rubble,” but the cafe “already displayed proudly its unfinished splendors.” Its most splendid quality was a flood of new light: “The cafe was dazzling. Even the gas burned with the ardor of a debut; with all its power it lit the blinding whiteness of the walls, the expanse of mirrors, the gold cornices and moldings.” Less dazzling was the decorated interior that the gaslight lit up: a ridiculous profusion of Hebes and Ganymedes, hounds and falcons, “nymphs and goddesses bearing piles of fruits, patés and game on their heads,” a mélange of “all history and all mythology pandering to gluttony.” In other circumstances the narrator might recoil from this commercialized grossness; in love, however, he can laugh affectionately, and enjoy its vulgar appeal—our age would call it Camp.

As the lovers sit gazing happily into each other’s eyes, suddenly

they are confronted with other people's eyes. A poor family, dressed in rags—a greybearded father, a young son, and a baby—come to a stop directly in front of them, and gaze raptly at the bright new world that is just inside. “The three faces were extraordinarily serious, and those six eyes contemplated the new cafe fixedly with an equal admiration, differing only according to age.” No words are spoken, but the narrator tries to read their eyes. The father's eyes seem to say, “How beautiful it is! All the gold of the poor world must have found its way onto these walls.” The son's eyes seem to say, “How beautiful it is! But it is a house where only people who are not like us can go.” The baby's eyes “were too fascinated to express anything but joy, stupid and profound.” Their fascination carries no hostile undertones; their vision of the gulf between the two worlds is sorrowful, not militant, not resentful but resigned. In spite of this, or maybe because of it, the narrator begins to feel uneasy, “a little ashamed of our glasses and decanters, too big for our thirst.” He is “touched by this family of eyes,” and feels some sort of kinship with them. But when, a moment later, “I turned my eyes to look into yours, dear love, to read *my* thoughts there” (Baudelaire's italics), she says: “Those people with their great saucer eyes are unbearable! Can't you go tell the manager to get them away from here?”

This is why he hates her today, he says. He adds that the incident has made him sad as well as angry: he sees now “how hard it is for people to understand each other, how incommunicable thought is”—so the poem ends—“even between people in love.”

What makes this encounter distinctively modern? What marks it off from a multitude of earlier Parisian scenes of love and class tension? The difference lies in the urban space where our scene takes place: “Toward evening you wanted to sit down in front of a new cafe that formed the corner of a new boulevard, still piled with rubble but already displaying its unfinished splendors.” The difference, in one word, is the *boulevard*: the new Parisian boulevard was the most spectacular urban innovation of the nineteenth century, and the decisive breakthrough in the modernization of the traditional city.

In the late 1850s and through the 1860s, while Baudelaire was working on *Paris Spleen*, Georges-Eugène Haussmann, the Prefect of Paris and its environs, armed with the imperial mandate of Napoleon III, was blasting a vast network of boulevards through the heart of the old medieval city. Napoleon and Haussmann envisioned the new roads as arteries in an urban circulatory system—these images, commonplace today, were revolutionary in the context of nineteenth-century urban

life. The new boulevards would enable traffic to flow through the center of the city, and to move straight ahead from end to end—a quixotic and virtually unimaginable enterprise till then. In addition, they would clear slums, and open up “breathing space” in the midst of layers of darkness and choked congestion. They would stimulate a tremendous expansion of local business at every level, and thus help to defray the immense municipal demolition, compensation and construction costs. They would pacify the masses by employing tens of thousands of them—at times as much as a quarter of the city’s labor force—on long-term public works, which in turn would generate thousands more jobs in the private sector. Finally, they would create long and broad corridors in which troops and artillery could move effectively against future barricades and popular insurrections.

The boulevards were only one part of a comprehensive system of urban planning that included central markets, bridges, sewers, water supply, the Opera and other cultural palaces, a great network of parks. “Let it be said to Baron Haussmann’s eternal credit”—so wrote Robert Moses, his most illustrious and notorious successor, in 1942—“that he grasped the problem of step-by-step large-scale city modernization.” The new construction wrecked hundreds of buildings, displaced uncounted thousands of people, destroyed whole neighborhoods that had lived for centuries. But it opened up the whole of the city, for the first time in its history, to all its inhabitants. Now, at last, it was possible to move not only within neighborhoods, but through them. Now, after centuries of life as a cluster of isolated cells, Paris was becoming a unified physical and human space.

The Napoleon-Haussmann boulevards created new bases, economic, social, aesthetic, for bringing enormous numbers of people together. At the street level they were lined with small businesses and shops of all kinds, with every corner zoned for restaurants and terraced sidewalk cafes. These cafes, like the one where Baudelaire’s lovers and his family in rags come to look, soon came to be seen all over the world as symbols of *la vie parisienne*. Haussmann’s sidewalks, like the boulevards themselves, were extravagantly wide, lined with benches, lush with trees. Pedestrian islands were installed, to make crossing easier, to separate local from through traffic, and to open up alternate routes for promenades. Great, sweeping vistas were designed, with monuments at the boulevard’s ends, so that each walk led toward a dramatic climax. All these qualities helped to make the new Paris a uniquely enticing spectacle, a visual and sensual feast. Five generations of modern painters, writers and photographers (and, a little later, film-

makers), starting with the Impressionists in the 1860s, would nourish themselves on the life and energy that flowed along the boulevards. By the 1880s, the Haussmann pattern was generally acclaimed as the very model of modern urbanism. As such, it was soon stamped on emerging and expanding cities in every corner of the world, from Santiago to Saigon.

What did the boulevards do to the people who came to fill them? Baudelaire shows us some of the most striking things. For lovers, like the ones in "The Eyes of the Poor," the boulevards created a new primal scene: a space where they could be private in public, intimately together without being physically alone. Moving along the boulevard, caught up in its immense and endless flux, they could feel their love more vividly than ever as the still point of a turning world. They could display their love before the boulevard's endless parade of strangers—indeed, within a generation Paris would be world-famous for this sort of amorous display—and draw different forms of joy from them all. They could weave veils of fantasy around the multitude of passersby: who were these people, where did they come from and where were they going, what did they want, whom did they love? The more they saw of others, and showed themselves to others—the more they participated in the extended "family of eyes"—the richer became their vision of themselves.

In this environment, urban realities could easily become dreamy and magical. The bright lights of street and cafe only heightened the joy; in the next generations, the coming of electricity and neon would heighten it still more. Even the most blatant vulgarities, like those cafe nymphs with fruits and patés on their heads, turned lovely in this romantic glow. Anyone who has ever been in love in a great city knows the feeling, and it is celebrated in a hundred sentimental songs: "The great big city's a wondrous toy/Made for a girl and boy./We'll turn Manhattan into an isle of joy." In fact, these private joys spring directly from the modernization of public urban space. Baudelaire shows us a new private and public world at the very moment when it is coming into being. From this moment on, the boulevard will be as vital as the boudoir in the making of modern love.

But primal scenes, for Baudelaire as later on for Freud, cannot be idyllic. They may contain idyllic material, but at the climax of the scene a repressed reality creaks through, a revelation or discovery takes place. "... a new boulevard, still littered with rubble . . . displayed its unfinished splendors." Alongside the glitter, the rubble: the ruins of a dozen inner-city neighborhoods—the city's oldest, darkest, densest,

most wretched and most frightening neighborhoods, home to tens of thousands of Parisians—razed to the ground. Where would all these people go? Those in charge of demolition and reconstruction did not particularly concern themselves. They were opening up vast new tracts for development on the northern and eastern fringes of the city; in the meantime, the poor would make do, somehow, as they always did. Baudelaire's family in rags step out from behind the rubble and place themselves in the center of the scene. The trouble is not that they are angry or demanding. The trouble is simply that they will not go away. They, too, want a place in the light.

This primal scene reveals some of the deepest ironies and contradictions in modern city life. The setting that makes all urban humanity a great extended "family of eyes" also brings forth the discarded stepchildren of that family. The physical and social transformations that drove the poor out of sight now bring them back directly into everyone's line of vision. Haussmann, in tearing down the old medieval slums, inadvertently broke down the self-enclosed and hermetically sealed world of traditional urban poverty. The boulevards, blasting great holes through the poorest neighborhoods, enable the poor to walk through these holes and out of their ravaged neighborhoods, to discover for the first time what the rest of their city and the rest of life is like. And as they see, they are seen: the vision, the epiphany, flows both ways. In the midst of the great spaces, under the bright lights, there is no way to look away. The glitter lights up the rubble, and illuminates the dark lives of the people at whose expense the bright lights shine. Balzac had compared those old neighborhoods to the darkest jungles of Africa; for Eugène Sue they epitomized "The Mysteries of Paris." Haussmann's boulevards transform the exotic into the immediate; the misery that was once a mystery is now a fact.

The manifestation of class divisions in the modern city opens up new divisions within the modern self. How should the lovers regard the ragged people who are suddenly in their midst? At this point, modern love loses its innocence. The presence of the poor casts an inexorable shadow over the city's luminosity. The setting that magically inspired romance now works a contrary magic, and pulls the lovers out of their romantic enclosure, into wider and less idyllic networks. In this new light, their personal happiness appears as class privilege. The boulevard forces them to react politically. The man's response vibrates in the direction of the liberal Left: he feels guilty about his happiness, akin to those who can see but cannot share it; he wishes, sentimentally, to make them part of his family. The woman's affinities—in this instant,

at least—are with the Right, the Party of Order: we have something, they want it, so we'd better "*prier le maître*," call somebody with the power to get rid of them. Thus the distance between the lovers is not merely a gap in communication, but a radical opposition in ideology and politics. Should the barricades go up on the boulevard—as in fact they will in 1871, seven years after the poem's appearance, four years after Baudelaire's death—the lovers could well find themselves on opposite sides.

That a loving couple should find itself split by politics is reason enough to be sad. But there may be other reasons: maybe, when he looked deeply into her eyes, he really did, as he hoped to do, "read *my* thoughts there." Maybe, even as he nobly affirms his kinship in the universal family of eyes, he shares her nasty desire to deny the poor relations, to put them out of sight and out of mind. Maybe he hates the woman he loves because her eyes have shown him a part of himself that he hates to face. Maybe the deepest split is not between the narrator and his love, but within the man himself. If this is so, it shows us how the contradictions that animate the modern city street resonate in the inner life of the man on the street.

Baudelaire knows that the man's and the woman's responses, liberal sentimentality and reactionary ruthlessness, are equally futile: on one hand, there is no way to assimilate the poor into any family of the comfortable; on the other hand, there is no form of repression that can get rid of them for long—they'll always be back. Only the most radical reconstruction of modern society could even begin to heal the wounds—personal as much as social wounds—that the boulevards bring to light. And yet, too often, the radical solution seems to be dissolution: tear the boulevards down, turn off the bright lights, expel and resettle the people, kill the sources of beauty and joy that the modern city has brought into being. We can hope, as Baudelaire sometimes hoped, for a future in which the joy and beauty, like the city lights, will be shared by all. But our hope is bound to be suffused by the self-ironic sadness that permeates Baudelaire's city air.

THE MIRE OF THE MACADAM

Our next archetypal modern scene is found in the prose poem "Loss of a Halo" (*Paris Spleen* #46), written in 1865 but rejected by the press and not published until after Baudelaire's death. Like "The Eyes of the Poor," this poem is set on the boulevard; it presents a confronta-

tion that the setting forces on the subject; and it ends (as its title suggests) in a loss of innocence. Here, however, the encounter is not between one person and another, or between people of different social classes, but rather between an isolated individual and social forces that are abstract yet concretely dangerous. Here, the ambience, imagery and emotional tone are puzzling and elusive; the poet seems intent on keeping his readers off-balance, and he may be off-balance himself.

"Loss of a Halo" develops as a dialogue between a poet and an "ordinary man" who bump into each other in *un mauvais lieu*, a disreputable or sinister place, probably a brothel, to the embarrassment of both. The ordinary man, who has always cherished an exalted idea of the artist, is aghast to find one here:

"What! You here, my friend? you in a place like this? you, the eater of ambrosia, the drinker of quintessences! I'm amazed!"

The poet then proceeds to explain himself:

"My friend, you know how terrified I am of horses and vehicles? Well, just now as I was crossing the boulevard in a great hurry, splashing through the mud, in the midst of a moving chaos, with death galloping at me from every side, I made a sudden move (*un mouvement brusque*), and my halo slipped off my head, and fell into the mire of the macadam. I was much too scared to pick it up. I thought it was less unpleasant to lose my insignia than to get my bones broken. Besides, I said to myself, every cloud has a silver lining. Now I can walk around incognito, do low things, throw myself into every kind of filth (*me livrer a la crapule*), just like ordinary mortals (*simples mortels*). So here I am, just as you see me, just like yourself!"

The straight man plays along, a little uneasily:

"But aren't you going to advertise for your halo? or notify the police?"

No: the poet is triumphant in what we recognize as a new self-definition:

"God forbid! I like it here. You're the only one who's recognized me. Besides, dignity bores me. What's more, it's fun to think of some bad poet picking it up and brazenly putting it on. What a pleasure to make somebody happy! especially somebody you can laugh at. Think of X! Think of Z! Don't you see how funny it will be?"

It is a strange poem, and we are apt to feel like the straight man, knowing something's happening here but not knowing what it is.

One of the first mysteries here is that halo itself: what's it doing on a modern poet's head in the first place? It is there to satirize and to criticize one of Baudelaire's own most fervent beliefs: belief in the holiness of art. We can find a quasi-religious devotion to art throughout his poetry and prose. Thus, in 1855: "The artist stems only from himself. . . . He stands security only for himself. . . . He dies childless. He has been his own king, his own priest, his own god." "Loss of a Halo" is about how Baudelaire's own god fails. But we must understand that this god is worshipped not only by artists, but equally by many "ordinary people" who believe that art and artists exist on a plane far above them. "Loss of a Halo" takes place at the point at which the world of art and the ordinary world converge. This is not only a spiritual point, but a physical one, a point in the landscape of the modern city. It is the point where the history of modernization and the history of modernism fuse into one.

Walter Benjamin seems to have been the first to suggest the deep affinities between Baudelaire and Marx. Although Benjamin does not make this particular connection, readers who are familiar with Marx will notice the striking similarity of Baudelaire's central image here to one of the primary images of the *Communist Manifesto*: "The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every activity hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has transformed the doctor, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-laborers." For both men, one of the crucial experiences endemic to modern life, and one of the central themes for modern art and thought, is *desanctification*. Marx's theory locates this experience in a world-historical context; Baudelaire's poetry shows how it feels from inside. But the two men respond to this experience with rather different emotions. In the *Manifesto*, the drama of desanctification is terrible and tragic; Marx looks back to, and his vision embraces, heroic figures like Oedipus at Colonnus, Lear on the heath, contending against the elements, stripped and scorned but not subdued, creating a new dignity out of desolation. "Eyes of the Poor" contains its own drama of desanctification, but there the scale is intimate rather than monumental, the emotions are melancholy and romantic rather than tragic. Still, "Eyes of the Poor" and the *Manifesto* belong to the same spiritual world. "Loss of a Halo" confronts us with a very different spirit: here the drama is essentially comic, the mode of expression is ironic, and the comic irony is so successful that it masks the seriousness of the

unmasking that is going on. Baudelaire's denouement, in which the hero's halo slips off his head and rolls through the mud—rather than being torn off with a violent *grand geste*, as it was for Marx (and Burke and Shakespeare)—evokes vaudeville, slapstick, the metaphysical pratfalls of Chaplin and Keaton. It points forward to a century whose heroes will come dressed as antiheroes, and whose most solemn moments of truth will be not only described but actually experienced as clown shows, music-hall or nightclub routines, *shticks*. The setting plays the same sort of decisive role in Baudelaire's black comedy that it will play in Chaplin's and Keaton's later on.

"Loss of a Halo" is set on the same new boulevard as "Eyes of the Poor." But although the two poems are separated physically by only a few feet, spiritually they spring from different worlds. The gulf that separates them is the step from the sidewalk into the gutter. On the sidewalk, people of all kinds and all classes know themselves by comparing themselves to each other as they sit or walk. In the gutter, people are forced to forget what they are as they run for their lives. The new force that the boulevards have brought into being, the force that sweeps the hero's halo away and drives him into a new state of mind, is modern *traffic*.

When Haussmann's work on the boulevards began, virtually no one understood why he wanted them so wide: from a hundred feet to a hundred yards across. It was only when the job was done that people began to see that these roads, immensely wide, straight as arrows, running on for miles, would be ideal speedways for heavy traffic. Macadam, the surface with which the boulevards were paved, was remarkably smooth, and provided perfect traction for horses' hooves. For the first time, riders and drivers in the heart of the city could whip their horses up to full speed. Improved road conditions not only speeded up previously existing traffic, but—as twentieth-century highways would do on a larger scale—helped to generate a volume of new traffic far greater than anyone, apart from Haussmann and his engineers, had anticipated. Between 1850 and 1870, while the central city population (excluding newly incorporated suburbs) grew by about 25 percent, from about 1.3 million to 1.65 million, inner-city traffic seems to have tripled or quadrupled. This growth exposed a contradiction at the heart of Napoleon's and Haussmann's urbanism. As David Pinkney says in his authoritative study, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris*, the arterial boulevards "were from the start burdened with a dual function: to carry the main streams of traffic across the city and to serve as major shopping and business streets; and as the volume of

traffic increased, the two proved to be ill-compatible." The situation was especially trying and terrifying to the vast majority of Parisians who walked. The macadam pavements, a source of special pride to the Emperor—who never walked—were dusty in the dry months of summer, and muddy in the rain and snow. Haussmann, who clashed with Napoleon over macadam (one of the few things they ever fought about), and who administratively sabotaged imperial plans to cover the whole city with it, said that this surface required Parisians "either to keep a carriage or to walk on stilts." Thus the life of the boulevards, more radiant and exciting than urban life had ever been, was also more risky and frightening for the multitudes of men and women who moved on foot.

This, then, is the setting for Baudelaire's primal modern scene: "I was crossing the boulevard, in a great hurry, in the midst of a moving chaos, with death galloping at me from every side." The archetypal modern man, as we see him here, is a pedestrian thrown into the maelstrom of modern city traffic, a man alone contending against an agglomeration of mass and energy that is heavy, fast and lethal. The burgeoning street and boulevard traffic knows no spatial or temporal bounds, spills over into every urban space, imposes its tempo on everybody's time, transforms the whole modern environment into a "moving chaos." The chaos here lies not in the movers themselves—the individual walkers or drivers, each of whom may be pursuing the most efficient route for himself—but in their interaction, in the totality of their movements in a common space. This makes the boulevard a perfect symbol of capitalism's inner contradictions: rationality in each individual capitalist unit, leading to anarchic irrationality in the social system that brings all these units together. (We should note that this experience of "moving chaos" antedates the traffic light, an innovation developed in America around 1905. The traffic light is a wonderful symbol of early state attempts to regulate and rationalize the chaos of capitalism.)

The man in the modern street, thrown into this maelstrom, is driven back on his own resources—often on resources he never knew he had—and forced to stretch them desperately in order to survive. In order to cross the moving chaos, he must attune and adapt himself to its moves, must learn to not merely keep up with it but to stay at least a step ahead. He must become adept at *soubresauts* and *mouvements brusques*, at sudden, abrupt, jagged twists and shifts—and not only with his legs and his body, but with his mind and his sensibility as well.

Baudelaire shows how modern city life forces these new moves on everyone; but he shows, too, how in doing this it also paradoxically enforces new modes of freedom. A man who knows how to move in and around and through the traffic can go anywhere, down any of the endless urban corridors where traffic itself is free to go. This mobility opens up a great wealth of new experiences and activities for the urban masses. Moralists and people of culture will condemn these popular urban pursuits as low, vulgar, sordid, empty of social or spiritual value. But when Baudelaire's poet lets his halo go, and keeps moving, he makes a great discovery. He finds, to his amazement, that the aura of artistic purity and sanctity is only incidental, not essential, to art, and that poetry can thrive just as well, and maybe even better, on the other side of the boulevard, in those, low, "unpoetic" places like *un mauvais lieu* where this poem itself is born. One of the paradoxes of modernity, as Baudelaire sees it here, is that its poets will become more deeply and authentically poetic by becoming more like ordinary men. If he throws himself into the moving chaos of everyday life in the modern world—a life of which the new traffic is a primary symbol—he can appropriate this life for art. The "bad poet" in this world is the poet who hopes to keep his purity intact by keeping off the streets, free from the risks of traffic. Baudelaire wants works of art that will be born in the midst of the traffic, that will spring from its anarchic energy, from the incessant danger and terror of being there, from the precarious pride and exhilaration of the man who has survived so far. Thus "Loss of a Halo" turns out to be a declaration of something gained, a rededication of the poet's powers to a new kind of art. His *mouvements brusques*, those sudden leaps and swerves so crucial for everyday survival in the city streets, turn out to be sources of creative power as well. In the century to come, these moves will become paradigmatic gestures of modernist art and thought. (Forty years later, with the coming, or rather the naming, of the Brooklyn Dodgers, popular culture will produce its own ironic version of this modernist faith. The name expresses the way in which urban survival skills—specifically, skill at dodging traffic [they were at first called the *Trolley* Dodgers]—can transcend utility and take on new modes of meaning and value in sport as in art. Baudelaire would have loved the symbolism, as many of his twentieth-century successors did.)

Ironies proliferate from this primal scene. The halo that falls into the mire of the macadam is endangered, but not destroyed; instead, it is carried along and incorporated into the general flow of traffic. One salient feature of the commodity economy, as Marx explains, is the

endless metamorphosis of its market values. In this economy, anything goes if it pays, and no human possibility is ever wiped off the books; culture becomes an enormous warehouse in which everything is kept in stock on the chance that someday, somewhere, it might sell. Thus the halo that the modern poet lets go (or throws off) as obsolete may, by virtue of its very obsolescence, metaphorphose into an icon, an object of nostalgic veneration for those who, like the “bad poets” X and Z, are trying to escape from modernity. But alas, the antimodern artist—or thinker or politician—finds himself on the same streets, in the same mire, as the modernist one. This modern environment serves as both a physical and a spiritual lifeline—a primary source of material and energy—for both. The differences between the modernist and antimodernist, so far as they are concerned, is that the modernist makes himself at home here, while the antimodern searches the streets for a way out. So far as the traffic is concerned, however, there is no difference between them at all: both alike are hindrances and hazards to the horses and vehicles whose paths they cross, whose free movement they impede. Then, too, no matter how closely the antimodernist may cling to his aura of spiritual purity, he is bound to lose it, more likely sooner than later, for the same reason that the modernist lost it: he will be forced to discard balance and measure and decorum, and to learn the grace of brusque moves, in order to survive. Once again, however opposed the modernist and the antimodernist may think they are, in the mire of the macadam, from the viewpoint of the endlessly moving traffic, the two are one.

There are further ironies. Baudelaire's poet hurls himself into a confrontation with the “moving chaos” of the traffic and strives not only to survive but to assert his dignity in its midst. But his mode of action seems self-defeating, because it adds yet another unpredictable variable to an already unstable totality. The horses and their riders, the vehicles and their drivers, are trying at once to outpace each other and to avoid crashing into each other. If, in the midst of all this, they are also forced to dodge pedestrians who may at any instant dart out into the road, their movements will become even more uncertain, and hence more dangerous than ever. Thus, by contending with the moving chaos, the individual only aggravates the chaos.

But this very formulation suggests a way that might lead beyond Baudelaire's irony and out of the moving chaos itself. What if the multitudes of men and women who are terrorized by modern traffic could learn to confront it *together*? This will happen just six years after “Loss of a Halo” (and three years after Baudelaire's death), in the days of the Commune—in Paris in 1871—and again in Petersburg in 1905

and 1917, in Berlin in 1918, in Barcelona in 1936, in Budapest in 1956, in Paris again in 1968, and in dozens of cities all over the world, from Baudelaire's time to our own—the boulevard will be abruptly transformed into the stage for a new primal modern scene. This will not be the sort of scene that Napoleon or Haussmann would like to see, but nonetheless one that their mode of urbanism will have helped to make. As we reread the old histories, memoirs and novels, or regard the old photos or newsreels, or stir our own fugitive memories of 1968, we will see whole classes and masses move into the street together. We will be able to discern two phases in their activity. At first the people stop and overturn the vehicles in their path and set the horses free: here they are avenging themselves on the traffic by decomposing it into its inert original elements. Next, they incorporate the wreckage they have created into their rising barricades: they are recombining the isolated, inanimate elements into vital new artistic and political forms. For one luminous moment, the multitude of solitudes that make up the modern city come together in a new kind of encounter, to make a *people*. “The streets belong to the people”: they seize control of the city's elemental matter and make it their own. For a little while, the chaotic modernism of solitary brusque moves gives way to an ordered modernism of mass movement. The “heroism of modern life” that Baudelaire longed to see will be born from his primal scene in the street. Baudelaire does not expect this (or any other) new life to last. But it will be born again and again out of the street's inner contradictions. It may burst into life at any moment, often when it is least expected. This possibility is a vital flash of hope in the mind of the man in the mire of the macadam, in the moving chaos, on the run.

EPILOGUE: THE HALO AND THE HIGHWAY

In many ways, Baudelaire's primal scenes are remarkably contemporary; in other ways, his modern scenes and his modernism seem almost archaic. This is not because our time has resolved the conflicts that give *Paris Spleen* its life and energy—class and ideological conflicts, conflicts between the individual and social forces, conflicts within the self—but, rather, because our time has found new ways to mask and mystify conflict. One of the great differences between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is that our century has created a network of new haloes to replace the ones that Baudelaire's and Marx's century stripped away.

We can see this process very clearly in the history of urban space.

The distinctive sign of nineteenth-century urbanism was the boulevard, a medium for bringing explosive material and human forces together; the hallmark of twentieth-century urbanism has been the highway, a means for putting them asunder. For Le Corbusier, perhaps the greatest of twentieth-century architects and certainly the most influential, this separation was the very basis of modernist planning and design. Before any genuinely modern building could be done, he said in 1929, "We must kill the street!" The street that Baudelaire knew, an arena for endless collisions and confrontations, would have to give way to the highway, "a factory for producing traffic." This "truly modern street," like the modern factory, would be a maximally automated one: no people, except for people operating machines; no unarmored and unmechanized pedestrians to slow the flow. "Cafes and places of recreation will no longer be the fungus that eats up the pavements of Paris." The macadam would belong to the traffic alone.

Le Corbusier and his disciplines in the 1920s unfurled a vision of a fully integrated new world of high-rise towers, surrounded by great expanses of grass and open space—"the tower in the park"—linked by aerial superhighways, serviced by subterranean garages and shopping arcades. This vision had a clear political point, stated at the end of *Vers une architecture*, Le Corbusier's great modernist manifesto of 1923:

"Architecture or Revolution.
Revolution can be avoided."

The political connections were not fully grasped at the time, but we should be able to understand them now. Revolutionary theme: the street belongs to the people. But if we can manage to wipe the street off the map, then maybe we can keep that revolutionary "people" from coming into being. Antirevolutionary theme: no streets, no People. In the post-Haussmann street, the fundamental social and psychic contradictions in modern life converged and threatened at any moment to erupt. Kill the street, and maybe these contradictions need never come to a head. Thus modern architecture created a modernized version of pastoral: a spatially and socially segmented world—people here, traffic there, work here, homes there, rich here, poor there, barriers of grass and concrete inbetween—where haloes could begin to grow around men's heads again.

Meanwhile, inside a great many of those heads, mystified modes of social thought have taken root. The twentieth century has generated two powerful mystifications of modern life. The first may be called "modernolatry." This word, coined shortly before World War I,

denotes an uncritical idolatry of everything that is distinctively modern, and, at any given moment, of everything new. For modernolators, from Marinetti and Le Corbusier himself to Buckminster Fuller and W. W. Rostow and McLuhan, all the personal or social dissonances of modern life can be resolved by technological and administrative means. The antithetical but equally misleading paradigm of modernity may be called, after Fritz Stern, “cultural despair”: for the exponents (or, more aptly, victims) of cultural despair, from T. E. Hulme and Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot and Ortega, onward to Ellul and Foucault, Arendt and Marcuse, all of modern life seems uniformly hollow, sterile, flat, “one-dimensional,” empty of human possibilities: anything that looks or feels like freedom or beauty is really only a screen for more profound enslavement and horror. We should note, first of all, that both these modes of thought cut across the political divisions of Left and Right; and second, that many people have embraced both these poles (as Baudelaire himself did) at different points in their lives. What both poles exclude, alas, is insight into modern life’s complexities and contradictions, into the beauty and anguish of the moving chaos. This insight, which lit up the modernism of Baudelaire’s and Marx’s and Dostoevsky’s age, has been largely obscured and lost in our own. Ironically, the process of mystification has often gone on in the name of modernism itself.

And yet, in spite of everything, that old “moving chaos” has kept—or, maybe, has renewed—its hold on us. This is clearest in today’s urbanism. Jane Jacobs, in her landmark *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), argued brilliantly that the modernist attack on nineteenth-century urban chaos had produced cities that were physically clean and socially orderly—at least in comparison with their predecessors—but spiritually dead. It was only the lingering vestiges of nineteenth-century congestion, noise and general dissonance, Jacobs said, that kept our city life alive. Meanwhile, masses of Americans, often agitated and inspired by Jacobs’ work, have been moving to save their neighborhoods and cities from the ravages of ongoing modernization. They have kept moving; and every movement to stop the construction of a highway has been, often quite consciously, a movement to give the moving chaos a new lease on life. No one has had the power to break the accumulated power of the halo and the highway: the tide of suburbanization and segmentation has rolled on. But there have been enough people with enough passion to create an undertow, to give city life a new tension and excitement and poignancy while it lasts.

Some observers are worried—and others are pleased—by the

thought that this wave of resistance is fundamentally reactionary: a revolt against modernity as a whole. I see it, rather, as a rejection of one mode of modernism in the name of another, a mode that is half a century older but just as authentically modern in its sensibility and its ideals. Baudelaire's modernism, as I have portrayed it here, may turn out to be even more relevant in our time than it was in his own.

All this suggests that modernism contains its own inner contradictions and dialectics; that forms of modernist thought and feeling may be long submerged, without ever being superseded; and that the deepest social and psychic wounds of modernity may be repeatedly sealed, without ever being really healed. The contemporary desire for a city that is chaotic, troublesome, impossible, but intensely *alive*, is a desire to open up old but distinctively modern wounds once more; to live openly with the split and unreconciled character of our lives, and to draw energy from our inner struggles, wherever they may lead us in the end. If we learned through one modernism to construct haloes around our spaces and ourselves, we can learn from another modernism—one of the oldest, but also, we can see now, one of the newest—to lose our haloes and find ourselves anew.

STORY

James Hoggard

A GIFT FROM THE SCORCHED MOON

When I woke up, my wife was hanging upside down from the ceiling like a bat. In the dimness her buttocks looked huge until, still waking up, I realized that what I was seeing as the gigantic curve of her rump was really the mounded mass of her back. I relaxed.

I wondered, however, what Marshelaine was doing up there. The sag of her nightgown resembled old skin about to peel off, but I knew this was winter and we hadn't gone out; besides, we owned no sunlamp. What puzzled me most, though, was how she was holding onto the rafter. Even if she had had some grips to grasp, she shouldn't have been able to stay up there for more than a few seconds because her arms are so weak she can't even do pushups and has trouble with situps. Her pectoral growths, nonetheless, are nothing short of magnificent. Sculptured fins, gracefully globular.

Her lack of movement began to intrigue me. There was no tremble of strain, no swaying except now and then a ripple in her gownskin, and that was caused, I supposed, by convection currents in the upper part of our room.

I was getting lonely. I asked her what she was doing up there, but she didn't answer, so I asked her again—softly; I didn't want to alarm her. Her gown, as if answering, began fluttering. She was awake, but I still couldn't hear her. Suddenly a sharp pain pricked long through my ears. It wouldn't stop. The pain turned shrill. I went dizzy. Vertiginous, I asked her desperately what she was doing up there. Shrillness; I yelled, "Shut up!" The pain stopped. The piercing shriek had become my drumming pulse.

"I'm sorry," she blandly replied.

"That's better." I was thankful that she was becoming less and less like a bat. I wasn't up to dealing with a load of guano.

"I thought I heard termites."

"We don't have any termites."

She yawned. "The moon was too bright. I couldn't sleep." She was as insouciant as a bagworm on cedar.

Reminding myself that she resembled a bat more than a parasite, I asked her, "Why didn't you pull the curtains to?"

"I didn't want to wake you."

"Thank you." I wished I were Plastic Man so I could stretch my arm out long enough to whack her gelatinous bottom.

"I'll be down in a moment. The moon's passed most of the way by already. You go on back to sleep."

"How?"

She didn't answer, and it was all I could do not to yell at her. Actually, that's an exaggeration. It was easy to refrain from yelling, primarily because I found myself suddenly suffering from a temporary case of acute lockjaw. I've had it before, but it goes away quickly. Usually. I asked her if she wanted me to come up there with her. She said she didn't think so, that she'd be down shortly. The vertigo returned. I swung my left leg off the bed so my foot felt the floor. That helped.

"Do go on back to sleep," she said.

So I did, and the next thing I knew she was lying beside me. The closeness of her created what I have to call intimacy. The toenail of her big toe was scratching my ankle, and I knew that she was also asleep. I felt more peaceful than a martyr in the bosom of the Lord. I had no desire to wake up and leave. I mumbled to her in the pale wash of moonlight over our sheeted bodies that if some disturbance came—knock on door, ringing of phone—that I might not respond but would stay loyal to the respite of our tangential slumber. She laughed, and I swelled large, but not as large as the gigantic spread of the vacuum where we lay. I shrank, then at once I felt tiny and huge, and in that moment I noticed that her toenail had left my ankle. I moved my foot to find it but couldn't and felt, somehow profoundly, the sadness of the foolishness of mortality. There

was no vertigo this time to distract me from it. So, being a reasonable man, I kept sleeping.

Then the phone rang. Rang again perhaps.

I woke up.

I imagined my wife's toenail had become a pulpit, a powerful idol. I didn't know any more if I were still hearing the phone ring or only remembering hearing it ring.

I didn't know what to think. I wasn't sure what I felt.

The ringing synchronized with my pulse. The two were indistinguishable but at least I knew they were mine. Mine! Both of them. Mine. Phone. Blood. Held in communion and trust(?) with Marshelaine. Phone and blood, ringing and pumping. I was dizzy again.

You—whoever hears me—would've been too, because I had just discovered that I had been shot. There was a hole, strangely clean in the moonwash through the room, a hole where my left nipple had been. Perhaps, now that I think about it, it was my nipple, shadowed. But there was no pain. And the phone had stopped ringing. In memory, however, I heard the shot. It was a cough more than a report. Continuing to hear again and again the loud cough, I knew that the gun was no modern weapon but a blunderbuss whose ball and wad had plundered my chest.

Footsteps were coming down the hall. Marshelaine's footsteps. I knew they were hers even though she was trying to trick me, trying to walk like a cripple. She was cackling too. The cackle was living outside her throat, somewhere between her and me.

Brazenly she snorted, "Something wrong?" My wound instantly healed. I wilted, flutters down my chest, up my neck, the disappearance of groin. Her toenail scratched my knees. I wondered where she really was.

My husband's a lunatic. None of this happened. That's why I'm going to

Then I heard the toilet flush and saw Marshelaine coming back to bed. There was a toothbrush in her hair. She was coming

toward our bed with a toothbrush in her hair. The style was hygienic Afro, and a pair of Mortimer Snerd false teeth bucked out of her mouth. The overbite was remarkable. Fingers clenching hips, she sneered like Dracula through the chompers, "I trink you blooooood."

I laughed and, full of play, she threatened me again then jerked her foot up on the bed and began hissing, her fingers clawing, and suddenly I noticed she was stark raving naked, and if I hadn't been laughing so hard I'd've prayed; maybe I did anyway, but all I remember saying was asking her in a stutter if she weren't cold.

She blared out again, "I trink you blooooood!"

I told her, "Come lie with me."

"I trink you blooooood!"

"Come here, Naked Lady."

"I bite you in the neck—I trink you blooooood."

"Shut up and come here," I said, reaching up for her.

She clawed at me. "I take—your esssence—into meeee."

I laughed, as I often do when I achieve, without feeling lusty, the mystical state of tumescence.

"My my," she said, spitting the toy teeth out on the carpet. "My my," she said, admiring the teepeed sheet. "My my my." Actually it was my knee making the sheet rise. I didn't tell her because my knee at that moment was serving a valuable function. It was protecting me from any sudden ferocious onslaught she might make. Of course, my knee wasn't really protecting anything. If she'd wanted to hurt me she could have. Easily. Even in play. But she didn't, at least then. She only smiled, warmly, and removing the toothbrush from her hair and dropping it, she said with admirable piety, "Shall I minister to you now?" I blinked. She was no vampire. She was a saint. We were both in the bosom of the Lord: ourselves. Perhaps we still are, though things are not the same. The Lord's bosom isn't as ample as some have reported.

I just read Jerome's palaver. It was noticeably accurate—for him. As usual, though, he left out what I call the flesh. He also put some phrases in my mouth which I never uttered. For

instance, he said that I spoke of *ministering* to him. I actually said, "Let's screw." I love him. The room was our monastery. For then nothing else counted.

To the flesh!

Our bedroom, as he indicated, has a beamed ceiling. Redwood beams stained richer than natural redwood. The color of deep passion frozen on them. Also in the room, as he noticed, is our bed. Kingsized. The sheets are Virgin Mary blue; and our bedspread, accordioned at the foot, matches the beams in color. To the left of the bed (left to whoever's on bottom) under the high windows are two black-lacquered chests-of-drawers with hunks of quartz at either end and in the middle, straddling the pudendal crack between the chests, is my jewelry box which Jerome also uses to store his cufflinks, studs and collar stays, along with two steel pennies and an old quarter-sized parking lot token. I shan't describe my jewelry, because since that night I've rarely used it. On the other side of the room is a walk-in closet which Jerome uses and a stand-outside-and-reach-in closet which I use. Shoes clutter the floors of both closets. On the walls is an even spread of paint, the color of rich cream. Somehow it seems nourishing, more organic than the sheetrock it is. Radiating through the bathroom door are sunyellow walls, a copper-colored bathtub matched by a copper-colored lavatory whose sides plane out severely to the walls. The towels I use are any number of colors. The toilet seat, which you can't see from the bedroom, is black. Jerome calls it Satan's Lid. I've termed it Luther's Grail. We seem unable to accept it as merely a necessary fixture. We need to glorify it, no matter how rudely.

On the night he was describing, Jerome was wearing a pair of limegreen shortsleeve pajamas with boxer-type bottoms. The middle button's missing from the shirt. Maybe that's the wound he referred to, but I doubt it. He wasn't joking about the wound. If he was, however, he shouldn't have. There's a touch of crime in my heart.

Closer to the flesh now. Jerome's chest is fairly smooth. He's not very hairy except in the cranial and pubic regions, the two areas which mean the most to me. His hair, which I trim, is light brown except when he's by the window in the sunlight, and then

it turns either blond or auburn. Mine is dark brown and I usually wear it drawn back in a snood. He told me once the bun looked like a chimpanzee's tit bunched in a large rotten pasty. Perhaps it does. I can't help it; I love him. Besides, he was only joking and I enjoy his foolishness. It's about all we have, and sometimes I think it's enough. Sometimes.

I read what she wrote. I don't trust her. And I no longer care about who's reading this, a careless diary from a commune of two. We have no children. We shall never have any. And I have no job. I don't need one. Ours is a rarefied existence. At least that's what we tell ourselves. Neither one of us, however, is capable of much truth. No one else we used to know was either.

I can't think straight. I think in circles, and I'm undecided if that's a sign of degeneration or creeping wisdom. What difference does it make? I'm only scribbling on our way to death. We're getting closer. I suspect that not much more remains except embalming.

To the flesh, she said. I don't know whether to admire her or have pity for her. I know very little, except that the air we breathe is fresh enough. I admit, however, that part of me is repulsed by the kind of honesty I've just displayed. *Nevertheless*— . . . I don't know what I was going to say. I can't think straight. I think in circles, and those circles, which are lopsided like the journeys of Earth around the sun, move, they move! . . . like the spiders she and I contain. They are feasting, but their gnawing does little more than make me itch inside.

Whatever Jerome says, I still love him.

She's trying to distract me. I can tell it each night when we go to bed. Each day. We rarely leave the bedroom. She never mentions her friends. I don't suppose I do either. We're bewildered. Our life is calm. Like that night. We kissed goodnight the way we've kissed goodnight thousands of times, and I was struck by the niceness of the gesture and by the sureness of the intense gyrations which followed.

More and more I recognize the absence of stillness in our situation. It's as if we're retreating, not out of fear, but in motion

toward some source. I've lost all sense of society. The world has become private, and she's the one who's moved me toward this privacy which seems more and more like a source. I'm not sure, however, that she knows what she's doing. I feel afloat, and she seems distant. We are calm for now, but I don't trust her. The calmness resembles sleep.

For chrissake he's the one trying to fool me. Calmness! Sheeeee! He's afraid to admit that I might be destroying him. Not that I am, but he's scared to admit that I might be. Perhaps I am. Perhaps he deserves ripping up. He's foolish. The spiders aren't inside him. The spiders are me. I wonder if diseases are hiding on the hairs of my limbs. I like to kiss him and to rub myself on him. In fact, I like kissing him as much as I like screwing him. . . . I itch.

I think he's infecting me with something. I don't care about leaving this room either. We have enough food stored up, and if we run out we can order some more—or eat each other. We do that anyway. I don't love him. I hate him.

But last night when he was crawling the walls I laughed. He asked me what was funny. After thinking about it, I told him I wasn't sure. If he'd been crawling up the walls in frenzy, I could've told him, but he wasn't. His progress up the sheetrock was masterful. His confidence was breathtaking. I would never attempt to climb a wall. I'm not sure how he does it. I'm not even sure why he does it. He doesn't climb walls to release energy. Maybe he does it for distraction. Sometime I'll ask him. I think he'd tell me the truth. And if he'd only ask, I'd tell him how I hang from the ceiling. I wonder how he does it. If he weren't asleep now I'd examine his hands—to see if the pads are gummy—but he's a light sleeper and I don't want to wake him. I'm horny. And I have nothing else to write. The moonwash is so pale I can scarcely see the notebook. I don't know if I've made sense or not. Oh well, such is the anguish of those who no longer masturbate. I quit fiddling with myself when Jerome and I quit society.

I should've stirred, because I was also awake and sexually aroused that night. I thought she was asleep. She was mum-

bling. I should've known she was awake. Maybe it's best, though, that I didn't insert my member into her. I rather enjoyed the tension. It made me trust her, so much so that I told her several times I loved her. I haven't told her that out loud in a long time. I hope she knows it, though. . . . To the flesh, as she says. It's as if . . . No. Not really. I started to say that we seem like strangers, but that's not true. I'm not certain what I mean. There's a rhythm of ignorance running through me. It's related to the spiders which she, for some reason, calls herself. She's wrong in that. She doesn't have anything to do with spiders. She's healthy, but she also gives off an atmosphere of frailty. I should help make her stronger. I should show her that I can be rough. I should maul her a time or two. That would be good for both of us. It would help clear the fog. It would also be better than making these goddamned New Year's resolutions out of season. I say they're out of season. Maybe they're not. We don't have a calendar. Just each other's body. I hope she enjoys mine as much as I enjoy hers. When I maul her I'll find out.

Jerome's a liar. We're not in retreat, and if we were I doubt that he'd survive very long. He's too guarded. If he ever let himself go, the moonlight would drown him. I might have to do away with him soon. If you're reading this, Jerome, my warning is a gesture of love. I want you to try to maul me. That's a matter of necessity. Or repressed hate. Hell! I'm beginning to write like him. I don't know where he got the idea about a source. I don't believe in one and never did. That's not true. I don't know what I believe. I am beginning to become like him.

We're ghosts.

Between my last statement and this one we screwed, so we're not ghosts after all. At least we weren't for a spell. We might be, though, now. I still think I'll have to kill him. To save myself. I won't feel alive if I don't. Perhaps later on, when I'm up on the ceiling, I'll drop down and crush him. If I aim right, I'll be able to snap one of his ribs so it'll puncture his heart. Or lungs. That would work just as well, though not as quickly. His pain might even invigorate me into an orgasm; I enjoy them tremendously. There's only one hitch. I'm afraid that on fatal impact he won't

ejaculate. If he doesn't, the murder will be in vain, will prove he's not mortal, because mortals leave wet stains, they *are* wet stains, and if he's not mortal, he'll get revenge on me. He won't kill me. He'll harass me. But not bloodily. He'll harass me by doing nothing. Anticipation of the chaotic release of power that's sure to come will torture me mercilessly, so much that I won't be able to stand his acts of kindness—the lovely way he feels my hair, the vigorous way he slaps my butt, the full smoothness of his lips everywhere; and if I tell him to leave me alone, he won't answer, he rarely does anyway. The torture's already begun, and I haven't even attempted to smash him.

Vaguely I remember telling him I love him. I shiver queasily. I'm not sure if I love him or not. If I don't crush him, I may never know.

We're both on our stomachs and naked as infants, which in terms of moontime we are. We've been stillborn.

She no longer hangs on the ceiling. She whimpers a lot. I thought at first her sinuses were infected or that pneumonia was swilling her lungs or locking her joints. I know now I was wrong. She's afraid there's no source we're heading for. She's mistaken. There is.

Her life is in bed, but she still needs rest. She's not as courageous as I thought she was. The spiders are in her too, and I understand now how she hung on the ceiling. She wasn't a bat, she was a spider. Her size confused me. She can't hang up there any more. The spiders are inside her. She's controlling them. In the past they controlled her. They were what was making her hang, but now that they're inside her they can force her to do little. Nevertheless, she seems frailer.

Her look is unsettling! She stares at me, but I don't think I register. The brown in her eyes is washing out, and sometimes they appear to be holes through which I can see, however hazily, the pillow behind them. Perhaps it's something else. Perhaps I'm glimpsing a part of her brain. Whatever it is, it's wet.

Something, I think, is going to happen. I have no idea what. I do know, though, that I can't crawl the walls as well as I used to. A lot of times I slide. My hands have become extremely

clammy. To keep from falling, I have to press hard. I don't think it's worth it.

Last night I fell. The walls are out now. My area for maneuvering is narrowing, but I feel freer than ever. The sensation, however, is not altogether pleasant. I seem desperate to myself, even hysterical at times, and yet I'm in love with Marshelaine more powerfully than ever. I realize that that might be merely a reflex response. I don't trust myself well enough yet to tell her how I feel. I'm thirsty. Her lips look wet. Or scorched. She's quivering. She's afraid there's no source. She's wrong. We're already at the source, and she's still thinking in terms of a journey. She's afraid she'll never arrive. She already has. We arrived together. The world here is now, without walls that matter. I accept it. Perhaps I even like it.

What a shame. He's more vulnerable than ever and doesn't know it. He's not even aware that part of him slipped into me through the holes in my eyes. He thinks the holes were illusions. They were real, and now they've closed, and he's been diminished. I'm glad, though, that he's begun telling me he loves me. I only wish I had the nerve to try to kill him. But I don't. If I did, I would be equal to the love he pretends.

I can't seem to stop sweating.

She's naked. I love her. She's moist. She's alive. And in good spirits now, too. She was hanging from the ceiling again earlier. And several times she dropped. Almost on me. It cost me my breath, but it made her laugh. In fact, she laughs a lot lately, especially when I tell her I love her. But I laugh too.

Last night Jerome died inside me. He's going to do it again tonight, he said.

Last night I felt a spider leave. Marshelaine took it from me and then discharged it in the toilet. I think we both felt better for the transaction. . . . I keep fogging up. The big event I was expecting hasn't occurred yet. I'm not sure it will, but I'm

getting used to its absence. The fog! Source; source. I don't think the source exists any more. I know it doesn't. Marshelaine knows it too. She's known it longer than I have; admitted the absence longer. And when she laughs now, she seems nervous. . . . She's reading this while I write it. She told me to say that she's given up the ceiling. She said the ceiling's as useless as virginity: at best an eccentric pretense. I suppose she's right. She often is. After tonight I'll write no more in our diary. I see no reason to record either failures or successes—I no longer believe in extremes, and whatever happens between extremes is a private matter. She just said I sounded as if I'm in despair. I am. I am also happy. She said that doesn't make sense. I told her that I'm avoiding extremes. She wasn't impressed. She did ask me, however, what I thought about love. I am telling her now that I believe more in a kiss than in love. She says I'm wise. I accept her judgment, however ineffectual it may be. She also just told me that tonight she would kill me. I'm telling her now that if she tries I might once more believe in extremes.

It finally happened. Jerome is paralyzed, and I am now free. I can do anything to him I want. There are many possibilities; the most intriguing are sexual. He can only move his toes, but I can move all of me, several parts at once; and since this morning, when I discovered he could no longer move, I have done just that. I have danced for him and on him. I have writhed against him and by his side. I have also shaved off all his hair. And if I am not mistaken, I think I have seen him smile a great number of times. I hope I have. Because the tears I can't stop are all for him.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese

**THE AMBIGUITIES OF FEMALE IDENTITY:
A READING OF THE NOVELS OF
MARGARET DRABBLE**

Margaret Drabble, but lately celebrated as one of the leading new women's novelists—the novelist, in particular, of maternity—has, according to a recent interview, grown “fed up with women—slightly.” Her newest novel, *The Ice Age*, represents her explicit attempt to free herself from the label of “woman's writer,” and perhaps from the constraints of female identity as well. Moving boldly into the realm of general social commentary, with even a few dollops of John Le Carré spy story thrown in for good measure, *The Ice Age* purports to explore the present state of England through the experience of a range of characters, especially that of its central figure, Anthony Keating. The novel, however, constitutes far less of a break with Drabble's previous preoccupations, attitudes, and style than might at first glance appear. And it ends chillingly with a simple and total condemnation of female experience: “Alison there is not leaving. Alison can neither live nor die. Alison has Molly. Her life is beyond imagining. It will not be imagined. Britain will recover, but not Alison Murray.” Alison Murray's prison consists in her love for her cerebral-palsy-inflicted child. The prisons that confine men—Anthony in the Wallachian labor camp, Len in Scratby Open Prison—promise eventual release, sentences have a term, and confinement can serve to structure an internal freedom, such as, in Anthony's case, a belief in God. The prisons that ensnare women offer no such possibilities. Permanently bound to their own bodies, to their mothers and sisters, to their children, to their narcissism, women remain consigned to recurrence, reproduction, meaningless labor. *The Ice Age* has not established Drabble's freedom from her earlier concerns; it has, however, rendered explicit the increasingly harsh repudiation of female being that has emerged through her rapid succession of novels. And her recent interviews, which have endorsed the superwoman image—you can do it all, sister, if you only mobilize enough will, determination, courage, and grace—suggest the same willfully innocent denial of

complexity, conflict, and struggle with respect to female being and potential achievement as does her blandly optimistic picture of British society. For Drabble has solved the dilemmas of womanhood by a retreat to masculinity or androgyny even as she has solved the tragedies of late capitalist society by a retreat to God, philosophy, and muddling through.

The publication of *The Ice Age* coincided with the republication, in the United States, of all her earlier novels in accessible paperback editions, thus confirming—as the complete Penguin edition of her work in England had already confirmed—a certain status. Drabble currently figures as one of the most successful novelists of middle-class womanhood. Ironically, the structural relationship of *The Ice Age* to the earlier, female-centered novels accentuates the limits of the intentionally individualistic bourgeois feminism—the ambiguities of middle-class female identity—that pervades, if in displaced and submerged fashion, the earlier novels themselves. What began as a quasi-autobiographical mode uniting first person female narrator and author has gradually given way to authorial intervention and growing identification with male characters, but male characters only as vehicle for recognizable middle-class female ambitions and identifications.

From her early novels about the lives of young women leaving University, marrying, bearing children, coping with frigidity and nappies, to her current preoccupation with personal release from the prisons of family and society, Drabble has constructed, if not an autobiography, something in the way of a chronicle of a specific female generation. A fictionalized, English *Passages*. If Anthony's turn to God at the end of *The Ice Age* evokes the *nouveaux philosophes* and a rising personalist and antipolitical religious sensibility, the subject matter of her earlier novels constituted an open invitation to female identification, reinforced by an eye for interiors, clothing, and trends, that linked them with women's magazines such as *Nova* or the upgraded afternoon television soap-operas that have flourished in the United States since the women graduates of the early nineteen-sixties found themselves at home with small children. As the embryonic women's movement, particularly in its more liberal, consciousness-raising manifestations, testified, many of the middle-class women of that generation shared a deep concern with the discovery of a self and the elaboration of a language in which to express it. Drabble's career as a novelist belongs to that phenomenon as surely as do those of Anne Roiphe, Lois Gould, and a host of others. Sarah, of *A Summer Bird Cage*, has just come down from University and is making up her mind about getting married while holding a job and observing the marriages of her sister

and friends; Emma, of *The Garrick Year*, is already married and coping with two children, her husband, and her first affair; Rosamund, of *The Millstone* (*Thank You All Very Much*, in the American edition), is completing a dissertation and bearing an illegitimate child; Clara, of *Jerusalem the Golden*, is finishing a degree, trying to shake off her past (mother and town), and having her first affair; Jane, of *The Waterfall*, is coping with young motherhood and a disintegrated marriage, enjoying her first adultery and orgasm; Rose, of *The Needle's Eye*, is fighting with her husband over the custody of their children and eventually will reconcile with him, for them; and Frances, of *The Realms of Gold*, having made it out of the domestic morass, is trying to consolidate true love.

The novels constitute dimensions of a female life, by no means fully identical to Drabble's own. More and more, they also constitute a running commentary, not so much on contemporary life, as on the trendy, shared representations of that life. Like a cheery and talented magpie, Drabble collects the latest themes: families and anthropology in *The Realms of Gold*; families, property speculation, and inflation in *The Ice Age*; and—predictably enough—health in the novel now in process. The quasi-photographic aspect of Drabble's technique, with its rigorous refusal of interpretation and causation, helps to account for the ambiguous and mirroring quality of her pictures of female and social being. Like Jane in *The Waterfall*, she registers the lack of an encompassing meaning. But, in accepting the erosion of absolute standards by which to judge or to condemn behavior, in this instance adultery, she rashly espouses a phenomenological personalism. The events of the novel themselves seem to pass judgment on the transgression: Jane and James embarking on an illicit, lie-based vacation, with her two children along, with Jane passing as her cousin Lucy, James' wife, have a terrible accident which leaves James unconscious and severely wounded. Judgment? Not at all. The accident was an accident. Presumably, a pure accident can be an act of God, but, if such, it was unmediated by the normal texture of meaning and prohibition.

Thus Frances, reflecting in *The Realms of Gold* on the simultaneous discovery of her Aunt Con's gruesome death and her nephew Stephen's disappearance, decides for coincidence, not connection. Drabble frequently insists on accident as a factor in plot. The point is the repudiation of cause and seems decisively related to her attitude to Freud. Let others read in judgment, should they so choose. Drabble rests her case on coincidence of act (adultery) and event (accident). That coincidence does not, however, stand naked. On one side, Drabble

weaves the texture in which judgment would have been: the sensibility of morality, the yearning for meaning remain where once law held sway. In *The Ice Age*, she reverts frequently to the possibility that accident may mask choice—self-destructive choice. But she leaves the issue open: a possibility among others. And against accident she postulates salvation, as in Jane's first orgasm, powerfully and movingly described in a scant two pages worthy of any literature of salvation, and succeeded by her gradual healing and learning to live as a woman. Or Anthony's discovery of God while in prison.

Thus love, true sexual love, or maternal love, fills the place of salvation. Drabble, in her endorsement of love as personal salvation, avoids a crude hedonism. The ambiguity of *The Waterfall's* ending amply confirms this residual reticence, as does Drabble's consistent emphasis on love as meaning and connection—not mere gratification. But the exclusive, accidental, personal, and even selfish quality of individual fulfillment underscores the limitation of Drabble's vision. Limitation not because happiness is wrong, as in some outmoded puritan discourse, but because, by accepting the social context in which it can only be so fleetingly personal, Drabble consistently portrays it as occurring at others' expense: much as freedom from rather than for, her heroines' happiness comes against rather than with. To be sure, traditionally, salvation has had highly personal connotations—the relationship of the individual soul to God. And the bourgeois novel, that great tradition Drabble reveres, similarly focussed upon the individual destiny. But traditional modes of salvation, like so many bourgeois novels, assumed that the destiny of the individual had a higher purpose with respect to the community at large. The marriage of a Jane Austen heroine contributes to a vision of proper social order, independent of whether or not one shares the politics or ideology upon which the vision rests. In Drabble's work, order—be it human or divine—proves elusive and problematical. Yet, paradoxically, Drabble heroines remain very much in and of society—ready to enjoy its privileges and advantages, provided they do not come at too high a personal price. Their alienation, can such a term be applied, consists in repudiating bourgeois-puritan constraints upon individual fulfillment while continuing to accept the social substance of the world, the corruptions and injustices of which are registered as meaningless fetters on personal happiness. Anthony's salvation in *The Ice Age* conforms to this pattern in its total personalism—he escapes from the mesmerizing entrapment of the market only through a vision he doubts ever being able to share. This conflation of the specific interconnec-

tions of capitalist society and of human interconnectedness reveals the depth of Drabble's largely unconscious nihilism—the mirror image of her heroines' narcissism.

The Realms of Gold, against, one suspects, Drabble's conscious intentions, captures this same interweaving of personal salvation and fatuous social repudiation. Frances Wingate, archaeologist extraordinaire, divorcee, lover, offhanded mother of four, one of the greedy ones to whom shall be given, asks herself "why she had become an archaeologist and what on earth it was she was trying to prove about the past." Frances associates herself with her lover Karel, who studies eighteenth-century agricultural history, speculating that "the pursuit of archaeology . . . like the pursuit of history, is for such as myself and Karel a further attempt to prove the possibility of the future through the past. We seek a utopia in the past, a possible if not an ideal society. We seek golden worlds from which we are banished, they recede indefinitely, for there never was a golden world, there was never anything but toil and subsistence, cruelty and dullness." And reviewing in her mind her ancestors' struggles with stony fields, her grandfather's growing of potatoes and tomatoes, her father's studying newts and becoming a professor of zoology, an aggregate of labors that had opened the world for herself, she bathes in her own comfort in those simple things, a tumbler of brandy, a handy nylon jersey steaming dry on an electric lamp, the knowledge that a breast lump had proved benign ("Even her lumps were benign"), and the choice between two beds with clean sheets in a single hotel room.

Frances's musing, as indeed Frances herself, captures the strength and weakness of Drabble's novels. Frances is a fatuous, self-satisfied bitch; too good at everything by half, not to mention too rich and unencumbered. Her unconvincing estrangement from her lover, her tendency to drink slightly too much, her occasional bouts with a hereditary depression (labelled as madness of a pre-Freudian type) fail to disturb the complacent and utopian mirror she offers up to thirtyish, educated, middle-class, female readers. *The Realms of Gold*, to be sure, purports to explore a good deal more than Frances: but the novel unfolds in one long sustained discourse from Frances alone in a hotel room in an unnamed city somewhere in Europe to Frances reunited with Karel.

The flow of words is less a story than an archaeology or anthropology of family life. Drabble offers us a diorama of the nineteen-seventies—a diorama fit for the museums of succeeding generations and explicitly equated to Roman relics and bits of agricultural machin-

ery from other pasts. The interchangeability of pasts seems to reflect Drabble's preoccupation with human life as behavior and custom—the changing manifestations of nature, of the human struggle against the various constructions of what Frances once refers to as the “human environment.” In proposing the phrase, Frances attempts to include the specificity of place (those formative influences such as lakes, so well understood by the Romantics) in the confusing mixture of heredity and environment that shapes the individual personality. But her identification of social texture and landscape inexcusably flattens the difficulties of the human and social environment. And although one has links, even with relatives of whom one remains totally unaware—in Frances's case, her Ollerenshaw cousins—these subterranean human connections serve to emphasize genetic recurrence at the expense of historically enacted struggle.

Drabble's predilection for such words as “fate” and “nature,” abstractions from the living of lives, runs like a thread through all her novels. “I am made the way I am made” affirms Emma Evans in *The Garrick Year*. Behaving according to one's nature covers the actions of many a Drabble heroine. “One cannot escape one's destiny,” says Frances, thus echoing Jane Gray who, in *The Waterfall*, reflects that often “in jumping to avoid our fate, we meet it.” And indeed, Jane's natural masochism, victimhood, and suffering led her to an affair with her cousin's husband. One can hardly miss the resonance of Oedipus in these pronouncements, but Drabble explicitly rejects the Freudian reading of that tale and takes a firm stand on phenomenological terrain. Like her ambivalence about history, her ambivalence about psychoanalytic explanation betrays a deep ambivalence about motivation and meaning—about explanation or interpretation of human behavior.

The social world has figured in Drabble's novels from the beginning. The London available to bright, modern young women just down from Oxford or Cambridge glitters, draws, but extracts its price. Sarah, the heroine-narrator of *A Summer Bird Cage*, might easily have stayed on in the university world had she not found the people so dull. Her sister Louise, around whom the novel centers, marries—tritely, for money, as it turns out—a neurotic, sadistic, cold-fish novelist, Stephen. Sarah, discussing the marriage with an acquaintance, explains the action: “She didn't know what else to do so she got married. . . . She was far too intelligent to do nothing and yet too beautiful and sexy to do all the first-class things like politics or law or social sciences—and she was naturally afraid of subsiding into nothingness, I suppose.”

Discussing their cousin Daphne, a “herbivore,” Louise and Sarah

speculate upon the moral implications of their own carnivore natures. Louise and Sarah feed off the Daphnes of this world. As Louise acknowledges: "If you mean that my way of life—our way of life—exists through the existence of theirs . . . well, yes, I suppose one does. It is a minority way, isn't it Sal? Money, theatre, books. . . ." So, questions Sarah, we cannot live without them? "How could we? We live by our reflection in their eyes." Fair, such an arrangement is not. But, insists Louise, the question of fairness is pointless. "London wouldn't be London if it weren't for the provinces. Oxford wouldn't have been Ox if it hadn't been for Redbrick. School wouldn't have been school if it hadn't been for secondary moderns. What can you do about it, except make sure that you come out on top every time?" And Sarah, reflecting on the overwhelming importance, for a woman, of looks—an importance comparable to grace—courageously faces the uselessness of pretending that beauty, the flesh, does not matter. "It does matter. And yet there is no moral in it." No moral at all if one discounts the advantages of diet, fresh air, health care, clothes, and all those other trivia that only money can buy.

Looks had afforded Louise her great chance on the London market. One cannot ignore the echoes of prostitution in her deliberate marital bargain. Such coldblooded mercenariness proved, in the event, a sin. But mainly a sin against the looks themselves and love. Louise should have married the handsome, adequately wealthy actor she loved, as she seems likely to do at the novel's close. The London birdcage, that carousel of theatres and television, gloss and chic, rich fabrics and large drinks, stands firm. The suggestions of critical distance resolve themselves into reflections on how nice middle-class girls who want to get ahead and to be happy should deal with it.

A Summer Bird Cage establishes themes that recur in more mediated, disguised, or sophisticated forms throughout her work. Of these, the themes of society and success, love and fate, sexual relations and personal identity, figure prominently. As does her identification with an established literary tradition: she refers not merely to Webster and Forster, but to Austen, George Eliot, Wordsworth, and a host of others. That discussion of art and of the artistic rendition of female destiny in particular follows through the rest of her novels. Like the carefully chosen, precise references to contemporary life (London addresses, details of interiors, descriptions of clothes, brand names) these allusions invite identification and recognition, the contribution of the extratextual to the experience of the text. Such references can also mislead. For Drabble eschews the social dimension, which, having

once evoked, she dismisses under the general acceptance of unfairness. By becoming moral—or immune to morality—social relations become personal relations, increasingly divorced from their social context. Drabble situates her characters with great social precision, but the precision itself masks an abstraction from social texture by the illusion of specificity combined with the essential denial of other social groups that are either absorbed into the classless language of emotion and sex or ignored.

The confessional, identificatory mode supported by the first person narrator and/or the largely female consciousness of the central characters, supplemented by the inter- and extra-textual authorial interventions in the more recent novels, affords an important focus of consciousness. But that confessional illusion remains tightly controlled, and the superficially casual, conversational tone in which it is embedded serves more to win the readers' acceptance than to engage them in interchange. Furthermore, the chatty, flowing, unarticulated style serves to carry events and observations of potentially unequal significance along on a common plane. Thus, the female theme becomes a female voice (a particular, not universal female voice) that organizes experience in inflexible, if deceptively confidential patterns. Unpretentious conversational flow notwithstanding, Drabble's novels carry a tremendous overlay of highly crafted imagery. Like the allusions to previous writers, the strands of imagery and symbolism weave in and out, offering intimations of meaning and affiliation to attentive readers and providing links between the various novels. The density of reference within and between the novels creates a linguistic texture, a network of signs that adds a neomannerist illusion of depth to the otherwise willfully innocent and everyday prose style. The cars, with their sharply drawn potential for violence and explicitly established equivalence with male violence, of *The Garrick Year* and *The Waterfall*, come to mind. As do the uses of water in the same two novels. Or the prisons and chill of *The Ice Age*. The list could be extended indefinitely.

In *The Realms of Gold*, Frances, walking through Tockley, the ancestral town of her father's family, is drawn by a sight: "It was a field full of people, and the vision of it flashed across her unprepared eye, shaking her in a way that she could not comprehend. A field full of people, only women and children, in a bare ploughed field. Stooping and bending under the large sky. They had baskets, they were filling baskets. What were they doing in that bare field? There were no crops, there was nothing. Small children stooped, women in head scarves

stooped, like an ancestral memory." The evocation of Wordsworth's field of daffodils could not be plainer—confirmed, should need be, by a labelled reference to his leech gatherer on the next page. Similarly, a verbal evocation of Millet's painting seems implied. The people as plants, the play on bare/barren echoed in Janet Bird's husband's reference to her as barren, are both suggestive of themes developed throughout the novel. And, observing, Frances realizes that the women and children were engaged in clearing the new school playing field and that they were enjoying their activity: "It was a voluntary effort, a communal effort" (118). So why, she asks herself, had she seen something so different. "For what she had seen had been an image of forced labor, of barrenness, of futility, of toil, of women and children stooping for survival, harvesting nothing but stones."

The mistaken allegory of her fantasy doubles for the correct allegory of her cousin Janet Bird's life of meaningless, pointless labor. Rural toil may have changed its form, but repetitive, untransformative action persists. The passage typifies one characteristic facet of Drabble's stylistic technique. It combines relatively privileged literary references with metaphor and symbol in an apparently transparent discourse that blends the most concrete references, both ordinary and arcane, with naked declarations of significance: neither the allegory nor the bare survival nor the meaninglessness are left to chance. The combination of elements produces an illusion of significance or meaning. But Drabble comes very close to reducing the meanings of an older fictional tradition with which she associates herself to arbitrary signs, the multiple referents of which results in confusion and contradiction rather than overdetermination. Her eclectic verbal acquisitiveness almost seems intended to make surface out of depth, texture out of meaning, without fully relinquishing the moral and emotional identifications upon which the older tradition relied.

Emma Evans, in *The Garrick Year*, reflects, "Poetry is one thing and living another, I said to myself at the age of eleven, and I steered clear of poetry for the sake, or so I thought, of the other thing." Drabble seems unable to forsake the one for the other, yet equally unable to forge a new relationship between the two. In her novels, the poetry and the living jar in uncomfortable ways that go to the core of the novels—that center where form and content, tone and consciousness should meet. Her chosen signs are not innocent: they promise referents. But her work remains deadlocked on a deep divorce between sign and referent. She is, moreover, culturally aware to the point of trendiness. From *A Summer Bird Cage* on, the novels have a literary veneer that functions with considerable independence from the life of the charac-

ters. Drabble creates a network of signs that intersects with the social, psychological—human, in a word—fabric of her story at given points, but remains essentially alien to it. It is hard to avoid the suspicion that she is speaking in two languages at once—that of female being on the one hand, that of double-first Cambridge essays on the other. Her literary language reads as if derived from an interpretive essay. The volcano, for example, into which David peers in *The Realms of Gold*, points explicitly towards the volcano of human nature. And who can resist Jane Grey (a self-proclaimed victim), or Emma Evans (Emma Woodhouse, Emma Bovary, Mary Ann Evans)?

By her idiosyncratic and intransigent use of labels, Drabble forestalls much obvious exegesis: her labels tease rather than name. For, in the same conversational tones in which she speaks of baby's food, wardrobes, vegetables, television, or plane crashes, she gives us fate, victim, nature, suffering, freak, madness. Meaning is denied in favor of observation of the multifarious variety of human life. Drabble does not neglect the intrusion of violence into normal life. But since her brief, and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to deal with its most positive aspect, the inherent violence of the sexual confrontation of men and women, the mutual recognition and acceptance of otherness, she has refused its living manifestations. Violence pervades the subsequent novels, but always as reported event. Frances complacently survives the violent plate-throwing and emotional distress of Karel's wife, Joy, and looks forward to tolerating more. By all accounts, the physical violence of Rose's married life with Christopher was unbearable; the reader never witnesses it directly. Distance anaesthetizes psychological as well as physical violence. Exhibitionism, which Frances recognizes in herself, characterizes all the heroines to greater or lesser degree. But intimations of confidentiality notwithstanding, the self-revelation remains as genuinely communicative as *Cosmopolitan* advice on how to hold a man. The somewhat schizophrenic deadlock between intelligence and emotion, and the tension between surface and meaning, gives the novels a neutralized quality. The material of life abounds, but deep resistances frequently impede its vitality. With due respect to Drabble's suspicion of the Freudian perspective, the apparent transparency of her novels bears a marked resemblance to the classic defense of verbalization.

* * *

The occasional authorial interventions in *The Realms of Gold* suggest that Drabble might be attempting to distance herself from her

material. She uses an admission of fabrication to suggest the real independent existence of her characters, much in the manner of the observed or recollected story, or the discovered manuscript conventions. Parenthetical references to "off-stage" characters dotted throughout the novel report on states of mind, whereabouts, or opinions in the third person. Taken together, these interventions leave an ambiguous impression that reinforces the sense of two discrete levels of discourse that pervades the earlier novels.

In *The Waterfall*, Drabble divides the narrative almost equally between the first and third person, albeit with Jane the center of both voices. She presents her preoccupation in that instance as one of lies. As Jane slips into the first person, she disavows the "lies" she had offered in describing her actions and thoughts as if they belonged to another. At one point, she refers to "that schizoid third person." The problematic relationship between truth and fiction figures at the core of *The Waterfall* but within a structure that equates fiction and life. Jane's problem remains that of giving a truthful account of herself; her ability to do so in the first person represents her healing as a woman. Her consciousness and her story come together as the novel closes in such a way that her truth becomes her ability simply to talk of her life—the easy sequence of words contained within the consciousness of "I" mirrors and confirms her growing ability to make love, take her children to the zoo, cope with the outside world, live her life. That appropriation of selfhood remains intimately linked to the words that organize communication. Just as the choice of words—most critically the "I"—signal the adoption of a point of view in the full recognition that various points of view may ultimately be incompatible.

Encompassing *The Waterfall* in a critical description endows the work with a veneer of unity that, in fact, it lacks. The split between artistic self-consciousness and female self-consciousness mars the work as a whole. In my judgment its pretentiousness makes it the least successful of Drabble's novels. Abstracting from its texture a description of its structure and purpose distorts the experience of reading it, but nonetheless affords a revealing perspective on Drabble's technique. *The Waterfall* could have been written from a critical description of itself. More than any of the other novels it exposes the dualism at the heart of Drabble's work. The author's interventions in *The Realms of Gold* would seem to reflect the same kind of problem in a different mode.

Since *The Waterfall*, Drabble has avoided the first person singular. Any "I" of the subsequent novels belongs to the author *qua* author. The author reports on the feelings and intentions, the consciousness of

the characters. The ambiguity of that schizoid third person remains, but has been transferred from the interstices of the novel to the relationship between author and novel. The emergence of the author's voice, however, confirms rather than elucidates the problematical quality of the relationship between truth and fiction. Drabble's purposeful artifice accentuates the gap between her intellectual, literary preoccupation and her involvement with her subject matter, producing a neutralization most clearly manifested in the gossipy, patterned speech of author and characters alike. The weighted words fit smoothly into the endless flow of talk (the author chats when her characters fall silent) without foregrounding. "I often think I'm a foul bitch, you know," says Rose, "pleasantly, conversationally," in *The Needle's Eye* (366). Janet Bird thinks with equal conversational delicacy of knives in people's backs. Desperation, jealousy, self-complacency, violence, death flit through the aging schoolgirl chatter.

Technically, Drabble achieves stylistic uniformity through the use of everyday words—the occasional swear word, the occasional esoteric reference fit into, rather than stand out from the flow. The early novels rely mainly on short sentences; the later ones feature much longer sentences, but compound rather than complex. Drabble links clauses, like items on a shopping list, with "and" after "and," or, in *The Needle's Eye* especially, by an arbitrary substitution of colons. Even in her conjunctions she steers shy of emphasis and causation. Her prose, like her explicit statements, turns connection into coincidence. And she reinforces the impression of natural continuous sequence by a characteristic repetition of words and phrases from one sentence or clause to the next in such a way that the incantative padding of the verbal duplication builds up an atmosphere of ease and familiarity—a conversational, ordinary cushioning against the emotions and the events. Rose and Simon thus chat about the ambitions of Eileen, a neighborhood girl, who had run off, leaving her illegitimate baby to her mother, who, obliged to earn a living, was leaving it to Rose. What ambitions had she, asks Simon. "Oh God knows, I'm sure she didn't know. She wanted to be a Spanish duchess, or a wicked woman, or a make-up girl at the BBC. And she hadn't a hope in hell of being any of them. It's enough to make anybody sulky. She'll be back, I expect. She'll stay away a day or two, and then she'll be back." Who, queries Simon, was the father? "She wouldn't tell. Well, actually, she did tell, she told me, but *I* promised not to tell. But I don't suppose telling you would count, would it? She'd probably like to think of me telling someone like you. He's a boy in a garage in Stoke Newington."

The passage exemplifies Drabble's stylistic skill in the particular,

and her deep reticences and evasions in the aggregate. Among other things, but centrally, *The Needle's Eye* is about parents and children, mothers and children, Rose's determination to retain custody of her own children, the conflict between her "ambition" to live as she chooses and her ability to hang on to her children, and her ultimate reconciliation with her husband because of the children. Additionally, the novel is about morality, moral difficulty, virtue (Rose's middle name is Virtue), souls, salvation, and the potentially corrosive, corrupting nature of even professional and moral ambition. The passing introduction of Eileen and her abandoned baby thus suggests a highly overdetermined significance and mirrors, albeit freakishly, the pivotal concerns of Rose's and Simon's own lives. Their conversational dispatching of Eileen constitutes a stylistic gem, comparable in its polysemy to the passage about meaningless labor from *The Realms of Gold*. Yet the prose, the aggregate of signs that offers these possible connections offers itself, its signs, rather than a serious investigation of its referents. And, because Drabble so seduces with her illusion of referents, she exposes herself to deep reproach for her failure to deliver: reproach, that is, for the particular intellectual narcissism that plays with meaning, promises meaning, offers communication and a serious vision, and then retracts it, leaving only a particularly bright and talented woman gazing at the mirror of her own virtuosity and, presumably, like Louise, thanking God for being one of the chosen.

In *The Needle's Eye*, Simon thinks about his indomitable, driving mother, who pushed and pulled herself and him out of the northern, working-class mire from whence they originated. Her remarkable if modest success story rested upon her writing and broadcasting about her childhood, local strikes, and so forth—a part-time occupation that, because of her uncanny psychological and commercial sense, had mushroomed into a lucrative, full-time career.

He had never known what to think of her books and her broadcasts. In a way they were ridiculous, they were sentimental to the last degree, they could not possibly be taken seriously, and their following was of middle-aged women like herself, who knew the worst and wished to have it made acceptable to them. Her broadcasts—she became a regular on regional Woman's Hour—were about hardship, done in a tone of smug palliation and petty domestic cheeriness in the face of disaster: her public persona was one of cosy, cloying domestic fortitude. They had seemed to him, as a child and a student, to be composed of such lies that he was bitterly ashamed of her for writing them: it was only recently that he had come to recognize their relationship to reality, their relationship with a true transcendence of hardship. The relation was not in the words, nor in the sentiments expressed, but in the fact of expression. Somewhere between the

words she wrote, and the woman she appeared to be, lay the sum and the being of her.

Hard to believe that Drabble, writing those lines cannot have known on some level that she wrote about herself.

The female adventure, traditionally, has been a psychological adventure: the discovery and acceptance of or rebellion against what it is to be a woman. Drabble has a genuine feel for the details of female life. Her treatment of the reactions of young mothers to their children, in particular, displays impressive sensitivity. *The Millstone* stands out against all her other novels for the condensed passion of Rosamund's growing love for Octabia. There alone Drabble brings together the story and its telling, language and emotion. Between mother and infant no angers or jealousies intervene. That their exclusive love rests upon the denial of the male raises questions about Drabble's view of women and points beyond the relations between the sexes to the relations between women themselves.

For all the evocation of domestic detail, confidentiality between women, and the familial realities of female experience, Drabble's women remain deeply ambivalent about men and defiantly live at the expense of other women. Drabble has yet to come openly to terms with her heroines' denial of other women, but the most cursory reading of her texts reveals a gallery of mothers ranging from the alcoholic (Emma's), through the merely repressive, unattractive, and uncomprehending, to the openly malicious and competitive (Frances's and Clara's). Sisters and sister figures fare scarcely better. Since Louise's relatively gentle fate, Drabble has given us a collection of female doubles for her heroines, including Clelia, whose brother Clara stole, notwithstanding their apparently ideal friendship—we shall pass over the incestuous complications of *Jerusalem the Golden*; Lucy whose husband Jane stole; poor old Janet Bird, merely consigned to oblivion; and Frances's real sister, Alice, whose suicide merits occasional passing references as Frances wings her way toward her golden future.

Drabble's technique frees her to give an account of modern female life that superficially acknowledges difficulty and struggle but that, by displacing them and draining them of their content, refuses the reality of female, and indeed human, life. Frances's apparent candor and transparency cannot mask her selfish and narcissistic opacity. Frances has left behind her the realms of domesticity (meaningless labor), which have left distressingly little trace on her advertised consciousness. But then Frances, with her sexually ambiguous name (which juxtaposed against Karel, the name of her lover, makes one wonder whether Drabble is groping for a model of androgyny—sexual resolu-

tion without sexual differences), openly claims descent from her father and her grandfather, not her mother. Women's ambivalence toward their sexual identity is no new discovery. Lessing's treatment of Anna's disgust for her own menstrual blood uncomfortably and powerfully captures the intractability of those struggles with and for self. But Drabble's unnuanced celebration of the escape from the shackles of female being constitutes a denial rather than an understanding.

And Drabble's attempted move towards a less female-centered novel has failed to resolve the problem. In many ways, Anthony Keating functions as the structural successor to Frances Wingate. He presents a rather androgynous figure. Not merely could his Oxbridge background and early-television career serve as well for a woman as a man—they have so served in other Drabble novels—but his gentleness with children explicitly evokes a maternal dimension. His fascination with the world of real power and money suggests a female attitude to the real world of men, and even his relationship to his business partners remains essentially passive and mystified. More important, thus separating the inevitable "male" components of complex female being frees Drabble unambiguously to forsake the womanliness with which she no longer chooses to identify.

Taken as a group, Drabble's women offer a picture of predatory narcissism, their occasional victimhood and suffering being, as Drabble acknowledges, no more than another way of getting what they want. Emma's forthright acceptance of being made the way she is made constitutes a foreclosing, not an opening of shared consciousness. She decides how she is made and offers her self-image not as some difficult reality, but as self-determined justification and arbitrary explanation. Such a female consciousness opens the path to condemning women to find a human identity only by becoming men.

Ironically, Drabble's mode of expressing female consciousness, the purposefully narrow and focused, has undercut the vitality of her work. *The Needle's Eye*, far and away her best novel to date, and a fine novel by any standards, breaks out of the earlier mold by splitting the center of consciousness between Simon and Rose. The different points of view within the novel, rather than between author and novel, grant the novel a new and promising strength. *The Realms of Gold* retreats to the earlier schizoid discourse. So despite its apparent broadening of scope and inclusion of new material, it repudiates the possibilities of freedom and life in favor of control and mystification. A pity. Drabble's talent is too considerable to waste on complacent, life-denying mirrors for middle-brow, middle-class women, who themselves deserve something better.

POEMS

Liam Rector

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WHERE YOU GET OFF

"the reality of the building lies in the space inside it"

Frank Lloyd Wright

& where do you get off, calling me the Hyacinth Girl?
Your taken apartment is burning, you worry what you
will inherit. I send all my funds to apartment. Your
"career" has turned banal, your apartment is burning.
You smoked your first cigarette in condemned building.

Your earliest sorrow is building. The mood of your
building is burning. That girl in your building is
burning—the mood you inherit is ashen, & somehow the
building is banal. Best now to straighten apartment.

We laughed when you first took apartment—we could see
that it meant you were building. With your feet off the
ground you were banal. & who is that girl that you built
with? You inherit the mood that you're born with, burning.

Your first cigarette is still burning. You inherit it
here in apartment—that ash that you burn & inherit—
that smoke that now flies from your building—that air
& that girl that you lived with—that girl that you
burned with, banal.

The toast pops out, toasted banal. The electric that
cooked it is burning. You breakfast with girl & with
bacon—your apartment flies out of the building. Cruel
gravity is what you inherit.

You always knew you'd inherit. She stares at you now,
staring banal. She inherits the ground of your building—
that girl stands apart now, burning. Partly what she said
in apartment was that *she* was the Hyacinth Girl.

When born, you inherit what's burning. In this case, the
banal apartment—the building you did with that girl.

Elizabeth Wray

A MAP OF SCARS

I look at my body
and at the body
which has lain next to it
on the bed of adventure
and survival

I look at the scars
we have got—
small violences
from believing too much
or not enough

All that senses moves out from the body
and comes back hurt
moves out from the eyes into the offering of the land
but sees only what is taken
moves out from the nose into each new season
but can't lose the death smell of the one just passed
moves out from the mouth to fall in love again
and finds not the warm raw flesh of ass and breast
but roasted rump of cow
and a lump of feathers gathered near the mouth of dreams
moves out from the ear into the rooms
of other peoples' answers hoping
the right one will curl around its question mark of flesh
but finds it mostly strays into remembered rooms
or rooms of possibility where there is little talk
and no one ever questions

These are the open wounds
that bleed inward on common themes
whose only temporary cure is
more of the same

This is the base of the neck and the chest cave
that wait to cradle the weariness of heads
This is the belly button that wishes to forget

These the insides of elbows where blood nearly surfaces
that desire a linkage of arms
These the indiscriminate hand palms in attitudes of want
where the journey of the body maps its small tracks
These the mystical thighs which hold like the arms
but remember more than the holding
These knee joints want to give
thanks each day and show support by falling
Those are the soles of the feet who
when they shouldn't
keep walking away

As you and I,
who lie now like two countries
with arbitrary boundaries of peace
fitting perfectly in our era,
have walked away

When the earth divides
or the blade rips the skin
there are moments of darkness in the world
before the body pulls itself toward itself again

Two Poems by Robert Louthan

PROVISIONS IN A WILL

1.
Not just anyone can talk, even
to himself, the way he wants.
Open my larynx when I die.
You'll find the fossil
of a word I haven't said.

2.
Fill my lungs with melted metal
to cast, in those molds,
a pair of something extinct.

THE WEATHER HERE

for Heather McHugh

When the tough get going, I'm left here alone
in this limited part of the planet.

They write that their new addresses are better,

that I wouldn't think so, and that all is well
with me. O I want to believe them, there's
no sense in relying on first-hand experience

now that I take drugs strong enough to relax
a building. I don't want to look at
the bracelet of scars I started, and boy was I

disappointed that the blood didn't come up blue
like it is under my skin. The weather here
is nice, final. I have some plans, but they're small.

Bill Elliott

LETTER TO MY FATHER-IN-LAW I

Because you spoke there,
in the Rocky Mountains, away from the sea,
and her mother went to school to Denver
She clearly shys away, for me, for her;
You are still the thighs and head she strokes,
waving through a Ph.D. while snapping out
a divorce, teaching while our heads balded together
in different generations: you have four fine books; I
take my hat off to you, sir, and read my bad reviews.
Your daughter, sir, I love.

She lies away from me, the back of her head
in my eyes like the curls of my son's blond hair:
she holds her thighs away today
in her usual fetal position, and makes the weekend
bed all mine.

We are scared, and frightened: note both meanings.
I love who is so angry

never to be unraveled from position
at breakfast
after she's felt she had
 to make so much
and all I want is her, in the morning birch;
after lunch
 when the summer sausage
 drips down like summer wind, I
drink beer and buzz and want her
 as the wren flies
 into the tent of the pine,
 misses because his eyes
 blur, and break, not blind.
At dinner, I think she
 wants me, we look
 together
 at the news like
 a large variety of the heart,
our minds lost in the general world despair.
At bedtime, it is always, or some,
 her wine, her pills, the book she reads;
 I've found ways to read her headache, she's
 finding ways to read my lust.
"I'm just settling into valium, dear."
Now myself, sir,
I've had four pills twice as strong (or is it half?)
and want to slip my arms around her thighs and breasts.
Her body is better than any pill. I am a body person.
"Can't you see, I'm reading this book? Jesus, my
glasses are still on!"
Slipping my 14 books
 and sixty papers to paw and mark and grade
 for the next day's class, away,
I don't see how she sees the dull night.
Together, we are better than print.
"You always just want to stick it in. Men."
"It's an expression."
"An expression all right."
She looks over, to see if I will; I don't, try
and won't. She does nothing. We lie flat.
"It won't matter if I lie here two years, holding you,
but everything at rest."
"Try it."

"I will; it's an expression."

"You just want to stick it in."

Sir, I've tried other roses,

putting her on top

("You just want me to do all the work.")

eating her

("You know I don't like it; it's filthy. If

you don't watch out, I'll pee all over you.")

stroking her only

("You don't like to stroke; all you want to do

is put it in.")

masturbating her

("You are so dumb, you can't keep your finger

on it, you know nothing about women, you stroke

and rub too hard, you make me sore.")

It will all work itself out eventually.

I try

masturbating (I get nothing out of this but depression.)

her masturbating me (I feel guilty; she is feeling nothing)

asking her to suck me ("No—you are filth")

coming in her after 1 minute (I feel guilty again; she is

feeling nothing and I am using her; this is a shared experience)

coming in her after 5 seconds (Even more I am using her; I am

impotent; she can never have an organism)

Sir, I love your daughter.

In her breathing and acts I know she wants your memory.

When all waves

are washing in from the north sea

like lives lived in love

moment after moment

and love is an open docking

this is a phase,

all will work out presently.

In Vienna, the lovers

cuddle themselves

home

in a gondola

after a night of dancing

where, twenty years before,

I saw your daughter's hair

and loved her heart, her body.

She turned, after a date, with upstretched arms,

hoping for a kiss, my arms were ready like a baby half-drowned

in the sea.

Tom Luhrmann

RIVERSIDE

The leaves turn a bright gold
and as they begin to fall
we see everything
that's been hidden:
There is the hill
where the bagpiper stood
every summer evening.

There are the empty tennis courts,
the highway running beside the river,
the people, only a few,
going down into the park
for exercise
and peace.

One tree still has most of its leaves.
It is shaped like a narrow cone
and is remarkably symmetrical.
“These woods, these fields . . .
will be the stage of your redemption”
it might say
if it could speak

though, who knows,
it might keep silent.

Nearby a little girl
is tying ribbons to the branches of the empty trees;
the Swiss psychiatrist who follows her
believes the presence of such goodness
will constellate
some evil.

The meadow
where the sunbathers worshipped
is unusually green.

Alan Nadel

TO MARCH

You repossess your presents
to lay them freshly open
in a constant give
of lame to firm,
cold to soft.

Snow
downs thick
in the overnight wake
of wind that cut
the last
thaw,
and covers patching and melting now
until a panic of clouds once more
will darken over before they part
the turn of surfaces to bare
your crystal blue
light that dares
time over time
to cast itself
away.

James Bertolino

THE ALIEN

The armature of her dismay survived
the disaster in Halifax.

It requires no polishing.

We've hung a proliferation of archaic verbs
like Christmas bulbs
along her tubes
& over the mesh-like grids. The effect

fragile as the idea of generation.

Jonathan Cott

DEW

Dew is light
It comes from some place else
It goes through the stars
It lies down on the earth
Awaiting air

It rises into shapes
A nest of mists
Floating against the hair
Hammocks of wind
And breathing snow

It wakens in the morning
Imagining the tears,
The little eyes, and in its hands
We must be here
We must remember you

Two Poems by Steven Hall

THE WOODEN SKY

I am tempted to talk
All afternoon with you
As all over town daily beauty
Is to be found in habit.
Half the day is shot
There is anxiety about
What to do about it
Which passes so the evening
Fumbling at your sleeve
Can trundle into the sky.
I would be fragrant with history
If you would entertain me.

A VALENTINE

Say not, my love, you think of oil
When you think of me, for me
The breeze sighs, sexy torso
Come out of the water now.

I look up the glory of our dawn
Look, dear heart, where has gone
The garish sun, how softly
Beams the starry moon, home.

I give you this fear Saturday night
Don't be angry if I sail into it
Beneath our favourite cloud
The sky deranged with blue love.

Two lovers in a Sunday harbour
Leaned their soft cheeks together
Their hair dark and co-mingling
Watched life that love had sent.

They have straightened, bent, tried all
Two hands above the head locked
In reclining, the same pressed for time
Sent love packing while they rocked.

Tony Towle

POSTLUDE

Then I can break
a rich design from the gaze,
with additions here and there
behind the clouds
which no one will disturb, asleep,
and wandering through the display.

Arthur Vogelsang

THE VEIN

later

Daylight wasn't holding on, it had no more will across the river,
fingers of light were turning over like hands into the black
shade,
but incandescents around houses and piers
popped and sighed, searing the grey flesh of the air,
and in this way in my imagination wounds
were being burnt closed.

Almost, there's silence. You swear there's a country
where all rivers cut deeper each year,
toss up dark, squirming life, and subside.
You swear it, and you almost remember it.

I have emptied my mind,
just as *you* ache to do
as houses stick up like sores or despair
in the heavy air
in this the light of day not holding on
as if you were shutting your eyes very slowly.

Someone brought back from a few minutes of death
should be here to tell me how calm and good death is.
Would he fear the extraordinarily powerful spotlight and the
woman
walking in it a hundred yards across the river?

* * *

Later in your house in an almanac I'm tapping on that country
where rivers are boring deeper each year,
floods like pregnancies in rich families
spread a happy stain wider and wider,
and then the heavy green water for months
slides through those gorges, those bigger and bigger gorges.

Our country is like a piece of broken pottery
there on the page, pink and jagged.

The grass we could see five minutes ago,
and the silver, obese river,
and old memories soaking the egg of the dark,
must be edges of our imagination,
piers we dive from.

Move your finger and hold it still—
that is the sea, swimming in it
you hope for a few miles, then lose your breath.

Carol Polcovar

DROUGHT

this summer seemed longer
the heat held itself to the seams of my dress
absences lined doorways
even death washed blue

everything might have been so simple
the rain might have come
or the low winds from the north

but everything multiplied
in a kind of silence
and later the surface of the rocks
made no gesture

Ken Fifer

APRIL 4

Like the stone Moses paralyzed
On The Pope Julius Tomb
We are almost across
The silence without interlude
Our letters run off the page
Into the silence after the words
I mean our days and nights run off

To the empty wire coat hangers
As soon as you step out you're lost
To the thermos on my left
I'm cold and hoarse in my outdoor thirst
To the ashtray taken away and returned
We're a flash of heat and the flesh of ash

I polished the silverware after you left
Daylight ran away through the plates
I looked out the window and drifted away
Forgetting the special fire we're made of
We're ashamed and later bored

Why not undress have some cake and coffee
I just meant to take your coat off
After forty years of stones and thirst
After anger like a wilderness
Sit down relax have a smoke
I mean our days and nights run off

Robert Fagan

CHRISTINA STEAD

After forty-five years of wandering in Europe and America, Christina Stead has returned to her native Australia. She has left us *The Little Hotel* and *Miss Herbert*. The latter seems to be of more recent provenance than the thirty-year-old *Little Hotel*, which Stead discovered in a trunk while packing for Australia and sent to Oliver Stallybrass as a Valentine's Day present. *The Little Hotel* was published last year; it was the first Stead book to appear in print since *The Puzzleheaded Girl* (1967), and only the third book since *The People with the Dogs* (1952). Its casual publication is emblematic of Ms Stead's career, a career enacted neither in the eye of the public nor within the self-conscious tradition of modernism. The manuscript of Stead's first collection of short stories was left in a Paris hotel, and she never got together the four hundred francs the hotel-keeper demanded to return her luggage. Stead insists she writes for herself, and, with her usual amusing dig at her native land, she speculates on how she would "publish" on a desert island: "If I were on a desert island, say like Australia or even smaller, what would I do? Classify the birds and fish, write poems and ideas in the sand: just as good as anywhere else." This indifference to fame is not false modesty but is a part of her radical political and psychological world view. She once collected notes for an Encyclopedia of Obscure People, a sort of counter *Who's Who*, and feels she achieved something like it in her first and last major novels, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1935) and *Cotter's England* (1966).

Most of what Christina Stead has told us about her life appears in her remarkable but very brief autobiographical sketch, "A Writer's Friends" (*Southerly*, 1968), and in an Australian Broadcasting Corporation interview conducted by telephone between Anne Whitehead in Australia and Stead in England (*ALS*, 1974). It is typical of Stead's career that the interview abruptly ended when "the line to London became unavailable." Still, in this and other interviews and biographical notes, it is clear that Stead has developed a "myth" of her publicly unambitious yet intensely lived career. She gives us a portrait of the artist as a young woman in which her life's work is an unplanned and natural development, beginning almost from the crib. She was born in 1902 and her mother died soon after. She describes how her naturalist

father “used to come in every night when I went to bed and tell me these amazing stories—about nature mostly, and the backblocks, aborigines, geography, geology, fish, anything that he was thinking about; so that when he went away and I wasn’t asleep yet, the room would begin to talk to me when I was drowsy, you know. That’s, I suppose, how it all started.”

Stead describes a similar spontaneous development at school: “Such a poor fist! But as soon as I fisted cat before mat, they recognized at school that I was a word-stringer. . . . I first made my mark with a poem written suddenly in arithmetic class, at the age of eight, of which all is now forgotten but the line ‘And elephants develop must.’” Then at age ten came “my first novel . . . on the life-cycle of the frog.” Of course Christina was going through her own biological development of growing up; instead of shying away from biology she exuberantly annexed it to her discovery of literature. Moreover, at home she now was old enough to go through the experience of stepchild, substitute mother, and storyteller which, much later, would give her the material, the design, and the style for her masterpiece, *The Man Who Loved Children*. In her brief autobiographical statement in *Twentieth Century Authors*, she summarizes this experience: “My mother died in my babyhood, my father soon remarried, and I became the eldest of a large family. . . . Eldest, and a girl, I had plenty of work with the young children, but was attached to them and whenever I could, told them stories, partly from Grimm and Andersen, partly invented.”

At school Stead’s life could remain a comedy. She almost drove a teacher from her school with a satirical attack entitled “Green Apples,” and then began a vast series of love poems to a woman English teacher, called the “Heaven Cycle.” For Stead this is all part of a natural progression which leads from a child’s learning-to-write essays to schoolgirl crushes to a bizarre pre-Raphaelite scene, and her first attempt to be published:

It was accepted by this time at school that I was a writer; and I accepted it simply, too, without thinking about it. . . . At teachers’ college in my second year, there was a young art teacher, engaged to be married, who was sensitive to the charm of girlhood. . . . She took us out on a sketching expedition and we stayed the night in some country boarding-house in a pretty place. It was full moon, fair weather. She called the girls to come out in the moonlight, take off their shoes, loose their hair and dance in the moonlight, on the grass. . . . She said she could read destiny in our hands. She took mine, thrust it back at me with a hard look. . . . I was surprised, then, when she said that if I did a book of short stories she would do the illustrations. I did the stories, she did the illustrations, four or six;

and offered it to a well known publishing house in Sydney, which in the spirit of colonial enterprise said they would take some if a British firm did it first.

Later, four of these stories went into Stead's first book, *The Salzburg Tales*. But now she had to earn her living and try to save passage money to leave Australia. She taught in schools for circus children, children from the outback, and feeble-minded children. She worked as a demonstrator in a Sydney University psychology laboratory and studied stenography in the evenings. Finally, in 1928 she was able to leave Sydney for London where she found a job with a firm of grain merchants in the city. Now her first novel, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, came into being: "The first winter I was there, I was very ill, and when I came home from work . . . I started on this novel, you see . . . I didn't intend it for a literary career, I never had in mind a literary career. It was . . . something I had to do 'before I died,' but this was only an instinct. I must have mentioned it to William J. Blake for whom I was working. . . . He read it over a weekend and returned it, rather surprised. 'It has mountain peaks,' he said." By the next year Christina Stead was married to William J. Blake and both were working in a bank in Paris. Now Stead becomes the published author not of one but of two books. Her story continues to have more the quality of a fable than of a battle on New Grub Street, as she gets published in a most roundabout way:

As a hobby I took up bookbinding. . . . I bound the manuscript of *Seven Poor Men*, and once it was bound, William J. Blake took it, unknown to me, to Sylvia Beach, of Shakespeare & Co. . . . With her commendation, we had the courage to send the MS to England. . . . Peter Davies (a famous man, godson of Sir James Barrie and the original Peter Pan), was a friend to many writers; he admired Australian writers. He said he would publish *Seven Poor Men*, but for me first to give him another book. I went home and began *Salzburg Tales*. I had been to Salzburg in the meantime. I wrote a story every first day of a pair, finishing it and putting in the connective tissue the second day. . . . This book was well received in London and I was out of it all in Paris, and so I have remained.

Ms Stead remained "out of it," has remained one of the "obscure people." Her novels continued to be published, but they fitted into no literary movement; her personal and spontaneous style was by no means consistent or well wrought, and confused the critics. The history of Stead's reviews in the *Times Literary Supplement* is especially curious. The *T.L.S.* greets her first book with "it is a pleasure to salute

in her a story-teller of profuse imagination with a gift of ingenious and rollicking fantasy." It praises *The Salzburg Tales* for their "wide curiosity," "emotional detachment," and "artistry." It commends a story describing "a preposterous colony of artists" and also the banker's tale of sensitive goldfish "which foretold movements in the stock market by changes of color." But with *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* the *T.L.S.* tells us that "Miss Stead's taste for realism has little of the liveliness and spontaneity of her sense of fantasy." "The clash of ideas and personality among the little group lends itself to some brilliant passages of argument" and Stead shows "a fine practical intelligence in matters of political philosophy," but the whole is "lacking in coherence." A year and a half later the *T.L.S.* reviews *The Beauties and Furies* in which "Miss Stead has tried to do something to which her talents are not suited." Rejecting fantasy or intellectual analysis, she now attempts "a novel of characterization." Elvira Western runs away from her dull husband to live in Paris with the "preposterous" poet Oliver. Every person in the book is "pasteboard." "Miss Stead has not the human sympathies of the more conventional novelist." With its review of *House of All Nations* in 1938, the *T.L.S.* admits that today "Salzburg itself is not quite what it was." But Christina Stead still hasn't the ability to create "character in the round." Her "panoramic study of international finance" is "impressive and queer" but "undiluted and repetitive." *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940) is even "more disappointing." It is a "wild and whirling American extravaganza," an "arbitrary and elaborately unlikelike chronicle" of "monstrosities." Finally, *For Love Alone* (1944) is a complete failure and *Letty Fox: Her Luck* (1946) is "wearisome and lifeless." This chronicle of the *T.L.S.*'s disenchantment with Stead's career has an ironic happy ending: when Christina Stead settled in England in the fifties she became a book reviewer for the *T.L.S.*

The *T.L.S.* hardly mentions Stead's devastating ear for language, an ear which has been turned not to the mythopoetic, but to modern life. *House of All Nations* (1938), which *Time* called "one of the most savage satires on the principle of money," was the result of her five years in the Paris bank, on which she comments in the interview: Q. "But a lot of people do believe that the economics of *House of All Nations* are quite staggering." A. "They should be! Those boys told me everything! People always tell a writer everything, especially in business, because they think the poor romantic soul won't really understand that sort of thing." Stead's originality of language is most pronounced in her untrammelled, exuberant dialogue. She creates and defines character and milieu by magnifying qualities of speech. Here,

for example, is the extravagant and outgoing language of a wheeling-dealing businessman: "Every crisis is a storm of gold: most people run under an awning to get away from it. Do you know how to make money, Leon? If you do, spill it. Here we are sitting in a shower of gold and nothing to hold up but a pitchfork!" In her next novel, *The Man Who Loved Children*, she astonishingly captures the game-playing language of children and their parents. This great novel is the story of Christina Stead's childhood, of how Louie Pollit, while growing up from her twelfth to fifteenth years, manages to attain the detachment of an artist in a society in which the family has gone mad. Its setting is transposed from Sydney to Washington, D.C. (where Stead had moved in 1937) "for a simple reason—to shield the family." Stead's remarks on this are wonderfully blunt:

Q. It is certainly the most powerful evocation of what it's like to live in a family that I've ever read.

A. That's a terrible criticism, isn't it?

Q. Terrible criticism?

A. Of family life.

Stead presents a portrait of the artist as a young woman *in a family*. More than this, she gives a revelation of the unconscious life of a family. What Joyce in stream-of-consciousness revealed in the mind, Stead in her intimate and outspoken group portrait reveals in the family, as Randall Jarrell points out: "A family's private life is as immoderate and insensate, compared to its public life, as our thoughts are, compared to our speech. . . . Christina Stead combines with such extremes an immediately plausible naturalism. . . . We do remember; and remembering, we are willing to admit the normality of the abnormal." And beyond her portraits of artist and of family, Stead gives us a picture of the war between the sexes which is effortlessly expanded into a picture of a war between technical and sensual humankind within a polarized modern culture.

The father of the family, Sam Pollit, is one of the great nightmare characters of modern literature. He is a liberal, a scientist, and a successful civil servant, who has never grown up and suffers from a sad case of euphoria. Sam is almost serious when he tells his children that in the future there will be "projection by dematerialization." When the children object that the passengers will be smashed to pieces and no one will travel, Sam responds, "That's what they said when the locomotive came in." He explains, "Each one has a formula and is reassembled according to that minutely correct formula. We haven't the freaks and neuroses of the Dark Ages. We were born according to

formulas: We are not a hazardous aggregation of mean genes.” Sam is a playful tyrant who uses the eugenic principles of *Brave New World* to bully his family. Henny, Sam’s wife, has not found a formula for reassembling humans, or for controlling nature. She lives in a female world of social and biological bondage, and maliciously gossips about the fate of other women. “She had a breath like a salt mine and a great belly like a foaling mare,” Henny says, “floating and bloating and talking about her medicine and when she went to the toilet. Then she died, and what does he do? Turns round and writes a book of poetry about his angel.” Sam is dominant but Henny is more interesting to the children, who are torn between the rationalized world of their father and the more sensuous and exotic world of their mother:

There was even a difference in the rooms. Everyone knew everything that was in Sam’s rooms, even where the life-insurance policy and the bankbook were, but no one (and least of all Sam, that know-all and see-all) knew for certain what was in even one of Henrietta’s closets and tables. Their mother had locked cabinets with medicines and poisons, locked drawers with letters and ancient coins from Calabria and the south of France, a jewel case, and so on. . . . Henrietta screamed and Sam scolded: Henny daily revealed the hypocrisy of Sam, and Sam found it his painful duty to say that Henny was a born Liar. Each of them struggled to keep the children, not to deliver them into the hands of the enemy.

The children become refugees wandering between the savage poles of their parents’ existence. Sam’s futuristic optimism insulates him from reciprocal human relationships. Henny confronts, but is incapable of solving, the growing poverty and disorientation of her family. Louie, with tragic and believable logic, decides to poison her parents. Henny consciously accepts the poison. Sam, fatuously unaware of the situation, avoids it. Louie must abandon her brothers and sisters to Sam and make her own escape. *For Love Alone* (1945) continues the autobiographical thread of Stead’s life. Its heroine, Teresa, escapes her family and Australia, but she knows she still must escape a more pervasive bondage:

There was a glass pane in the breast of each girl; there every other girl could see the rat gnawing in her, the fear of being on the shelf. . . . A woman is a hunter without a forest. There is a short open season and a long closed season. . . . Yes, we’re pressed for time. We haven’t time to get educated, have a career, for the crop must be produced before it’s autumn. . . . But they won’t even rebel, they’re afraid. They’re afraid to squander their few years. The long night of spinsterhood will come down. What’s to be done? But one thing is sure, I won’t do it, they won’t get me.

Nothing in Teresa's environment furnishes her with sexual models to match her fantasies. While engaged young women her age are stitching their trousseaux, she reads Ovid's *Art of Love* and Piere Louys. Teresa knows what she wants: "One wants love. . . . I am certain that as I lie here now, frenzied with desire and want, all women have lain for centuries, since innocent times and never an ounce of bravado to throw off the servitude of timidity. If ever I have money, I'll build hostels where youth can go free, no watchman, no fee." Her dreams of free love are limited by the lovers she finds. After a long false start, she discovers enormous sexual satisfaction, but must tailor her life to her lover's monogamous ideals: she must conform to his stereotype of a woman's love as "passionate, ideal, romantic," rather than communicate her full and unromantic feelings, which scare him. Thus she "resigned herself now to playing a part with him, because she loved him," even though she realized "that each day would be a step farther into the labyrinth of concealment and loving mendacity." She reflects, "I belong to the race which is not allowed to reason. *Love is blind* is the dictum, whereas, with me at least, Love sees everything."

For Love Alone beautifully anatomizes the distortions, false hopes, and bad faith that characterize dealings between the sexes; but Teresa does discover a saner and more fruitful sexual relationship than any Louie could have observed. Christina says herself that "meeting a man who was my equal and liked me . . . was the great freedom for me. You can't live alone. Freedom is association with other people, and especially with a sexual partner." Her husband, William Blake, was not only a businessman, but also a novelist and a Marxist theoretician. The character modeled after Blake in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* says: "Women are an oppressed class and their peculiarities are imposed on them by society to keep them in order." This is very much the burden of *Letty Fox: Her Luck* (1946) and *A Little Tea, A Little Chat* (1948). Stead's chronicle of the Greenwich Village love affairs of Letty Fox was too much for Stead's native land, which banned the book. Similarly, *A Little Tea, A Little Chat* provoked the ire of *Time*, which declared "that Miss Stead has chosen to write about the most loathsome and amoral characters that can be dredged up from the cocktail bars and brokerage houses of New York." The novel "assumes the quality of a very shrill feminine nightmare."

In the meantime Stead and her husband were going through their own nightmare. Stead was living in Hollywood and writing for the movies, but she had also written for the *Left Review* and *New Masses*. She reports that "I was not in the line of fire at all, but I thought that Bill should get out and some of my friends too, at that time. . . . It was

very unpleasant." From 1947 to 1953, when she settled in England, Christina Stead lived in Antwerp, Montreux, Bologna, Basle, Brussels, Lausanne, London, Paris, and The Hague. And, except for three translations of French novels published in '55 and '56, she seemed headed for literary oblivion. Elizabeth Hardwick did attempt a resurrection of "The Neglected Novels of Christina Stead" in the pages of the *New Republic* in 1955, but little else was heard until in 1965 *The Man Who Loved Children* was republished with Randall Jarrell's extraordinary introduction. Then *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* and *For Love Alone* were republished in Australia. And in 1966 Christina Stead published her first new novel in fourteen years, *Cotter's England*, badly retitled for American readers *Dark Places of the Heart*. The novel prompted some reevaluations, including this encomium by José Yglesias:

Impervious to literary fashions, she is now in serene possession of a fiction technique that is a perfect crossing . . . of the Dreiser and James legacies. . . . She deals with common, accessible experience and immerses the reader so thoroughly in the scene that the reading becomes a life experience, not an entrance into that enclosed other world of the novelist's about which it has become a cliché to speak. . . . *Dark Places of the Heart* is a great novel and . . . in the wings stand eight out-of-print novels which can tell us, as Balzac did for the same period a century ago, how the world has chosen us to live. . . .

(*The Nation*, Oct. 24, 1966)

In 1967 Stead was nominated for the Britannica Australia Award of \$10,000, but the award council declared her ineligible for the award because, though still a citizen, she'd lived abroad since 1928. At this time her husband died. And her novel about Hollywood and McCarthyism, *I'm Dying Laughing*, was criticized by her publisher for not presenting sufficient political history to a public which had forgotten McCarthy. She amassed "all the documentation in the world" but decided "I can't write it up—it's not my line you know" and "dropped it." This mammoth novel which defines "Miss America" just as *The Man Who Loved Children* defined "Mr. America" will, it is rumored, appear soon. Meanwhile, we have whatever falls from Ms Stead's pen, or is found wherever she has left it, plus *Miss Herbert*. The latter is as characteristically unique as anything in Stead's work. It is a novel within a narrow genre of unrelenting satire of its central character. Eleanor passes through the fringes of feminist, bohemian, demimonde, cultist and literary London. The satire is not only of Eleanor, but of a society where her clichés of life are, for the

most part, accepted. (Other characters do occasionally give away their unease. But the only mind we are allowed into, indeed trapped in, is Eleanor's.)

The fast pace of this novel is remarkable. We memorize the name of a "major" character and she or he promptly drops out of Eleanor's life. The pace and seemingly random plotting indicate that Eleanor does not structure her life, but flees any concrete awareness of life in favor of transitory affairs and momentary ambitions. She does attempt to slow down into respectability by marrying a man she does not love. However, her new allegiance is to marriage and the role of suburban housewife—not to her husband, who repays her by becoming a crazy (and amusing) nemesis. She turns to literature not out of personal commitment, but because literature is a glamorous way to (barely) make a living for an educated nonperson. She lacks the imagination to supply plot, character or milieu; but, when her father surprisingly produces a novel, she can tailor it for the public and begin a long collaboration with authors in her roles as publisher's reader, editor and agent. Stead shows us what she thinks of both the "literary" establishment, and so-called good writing. Eleanor rewrites a short story "twenty-three times, arranging it differently for each market." But the story "grew simpler, clearer, more barren each time" as she applied her rules of "Short sentences . . . The everyday for the strange . . . 'Ware adjectives! . . . no crotchets, no politics . . . Simple relations." Eleanor's rules are antitheses of the free-form art Ms Stead has always practiced. Eleanor is a transmitter of the given, not like Stead a capturer of the unexpected within us. Against Eleanor we can best conclude with Stead's description (*London Magazine*, Feb. 1970) of how she herself writes:

I'm a psychological writer, and my drama is the drama of the person. The start of a story is like a love affair, exactly. It's like a stone hitting you. You can't argue with it. I wait and wait for the drama to develop. I watch the characters and the situation move and don't interfere. I'm patient. I'm lying low.

The following letter by Christina Stead, written in response to a request to write about the Women's Movement, seems to us interesting enough to print here.

Dear Sirs:

After having promised to write for you and having got your questionnaire twice, I have let you down and do not like myself; but all I can do now is to write you this personal letter, from which of course you can quote if you wish—but I do not want you to pay me for such unprofessional writing. I kept on travelling round the States (Australian States), visitor at universities, etc. and am terribly behind in my work.

Visiting the universities, I do not meet unlucky and housebound women, or untaught women; and the only place I can meet those suffering from what is now called “suburban loneliness” is in the suburb which is my home-base at present, a very populous place of small homes, nest of the “one-man family” (as Germaine Greer sensibly puts it); the intensest interest outside the home, apart from relatives, being in the children, and their football clubs, in their schoolwork (slightly less); and where all social activities are connected with the football clubs. There are a number of churches, R.S.L. clubs (Returned Soldiers' Leagues) which do nothing for the women tied to the home. The women are active in the children's interests and clubs, in other words sacrifice willingly their entire adult lives.

Australian women achieved the franchise in 1902 (New Zealand, 1893) and there it seemed to rest. But now the sudden urgency of the issue of women's liberation (or emancipation, as they say in Africa, where the black women face another set-up) and even the showmanship of some female leaders have made it possible to ask any woman at all, any suburban or family-limited woman, “What do you think of women's liberation?” and to get an answer at once; in other words every woman has thought about it. Probably they always had an answer, but were suffocated by fear, gentility and convention.

Now they say, “I benefitted from the women's movement at work, for I had equal pay for work of equal value; and I am sorry I did nothing for the movement that got it for me” (a retired post office worker); and “I think women should draw in their horns and they will find there is enough to do at home” (a happily married woman, childless, and of great energy); and “I am in favour of it, but I don't want the tenderness of men towards women to disappear” (a happily married young working woman, childless as yet); and “I think we

ought to get together and discuss things, but we don't want lawyers and politicians mixing in" (a twice-married woman with adult and young children, who works by looking after elderly disabled and sick people who live alone). The answers vary according to the situation, naturally; but the surprising thing is the readiness of the answers. It could not have happened like this a few years ago. The lastnamed woman had read a few pages of Germaine Greer's book "The Female Eunuch" and had been enlightened by the idea that "you are a real person; too many personalities are lost behind the kitchen sink" (not a quote, that is what this woman said).

My experience is limited because of the wandering life I led, living in a number of countries of which I was not a citizen and for the better part meeting married couples of modern ideas in great cities. So I must speak only of the little I see now. In several countries I have seen a solution to the problems of suburban loneliness and the man-dominated family. Young couples, married or unmarried, with or without children, are living in communities, sharing everything, (including poverty and unemployment), work and child-care and all domestic problems; and a number of middle-class families, for example, in university setting are forming communities of three or four families. They buy a plot of land, build a house or houses and go there as often as they can—weekends, holidays; and there the craftsmen and women among them have their own workshops; they build, construct, weave, paint, and have vegetable gardens and fruit-trees, go berry-picking together, do everything together; and there is a move even to "adopt grandmothers," that is, elderly women willing and able to enjoy the children's company and the communal life. This is thought to encourage sympathy for the old. In many families the married children with their own children gather in their mother's homes on the weekends and children are exchanged during holidays. Sometimes neighbours become such good friends that when one moves the nextdoor people move too to keep up the friendship. This camp or longhouse idea is at least one attractive solution to the apparently outmoded one-man family. The men can have company and beer without having to go to the pub, the women can talk together without exciting the jealousy and suspicion of the husbands; the children are spared the outbursts of domestic misery which spring from the common unhappy marriage where the wife is the husband's only serf.

As for female homosexuality: Lesbians sometimes wish to better women's lot and they may do so, as any other woman; but their inclination often is to separate women from men and discourage

women's natural affection for men; they play upon the greatest weakness of women, their cultivated timidity, and rob them of one of the best and most momentous things in life, love of a man. Lesbians fighting for their own interests are no more suited to the women's movement than so-called gay liberation is suited to the trades union movement; it is quite out of context.

I do not know if there is a "feminine consciousness." Our perceptions and deductions spring from education, experience and function; but J.B.S. Haldane, the British scientist, wrote once that science would not be complete till women scientists were at work with their different awareness; so it is clear that this well-known biologist thought that women had a particular consciousness. I do not know. Each of us is separate, touching the elephant of reality with one hand; so it is possible.

One thing I have noticed myself in the last year or two: that male reviewers of books have become very conscious of the women's claims for liberation. The kindly tend to see a claim in any book by a woman to show sympathy, even where no claim is being made; and others, afraid that they are being attacked are soured, sharp when they see a book by a woman about a female character and tend to see an attack when none is intended. It is not entirely possible at the moment to do the portrait of a woman and present it as such, as it is of a man; it is thought to have a special meaning.

Yours truly,
Christina Stead

P.S. One of the good things the movement has done is to produce endless articles and books about women and by women; and to produce new writers of fiction and poetry among them—not all very good, but all attempting creative work. I believe that everyone should write if possible and be published if possible, for this leads to a great literature eventually, an enrichment undreamed of. We know that women are timid and afraid (quite often of competition with men, whom they think "will always win") but I daresay that the first appearance of her poem or story in print will encourage even the timid. When I first returned to this country I was asked to join the Society of Women Writers and was irritated that there should be in their minds a difference between men and women writers for I hate any sort of segregation; and I asked the society why. They gave a very weak answer in their journal, but the meaning of it was the above—that many

women are too timid to try writing if men are about. I am not sympathetic really, but if this is so, it must be taken care of. And I have also a beautifully produced book "About Australian Women"—tape-records and statements and well-produced photographs celebrating womankind, of any colour (it includes photographs of our aboriginal women). It's "a good idea" (as it says itself)—it gives a different picture of woman from the ones in the glossies. That is all. I'm sorry I haven't done the right thing by you.

F. W. Dupee

1904–1979

GOING TO THE MOVIES

Jonathan Baumbach

LETTER FROM SEATTLE

That the natives, mostly resettled Midwesterners, perceive Seattle as God's country makes it difficult for the visitor to give this beautiful city its due. Seattle is a centerless sprawl of parks and lakes, of used-car lots, shopping malls and ugly overpriced suburban settlements, surrounded by an astonishment of mountains. The weather is not as bad as advertised (Seattle is so assured of its virtues as a place to live that it exaggerates its own bad climate as a means of deterring settlers), although it rained almost continuously the first month I was here. It rains with not much ferocity, but with patient commitment to the long run. During the winter, which is mild by Northeastern standards, precipitation seems constant, a part of the ambience of the environment. A moviegoer's climate, I thought, and was immediately disappointed to discover that there were almost no movies being shown in the afternoons. The "foremost city in the Northwest" seemed a Puritan outpost with too little (or too much) respect for the illicit, too committed to the ennobling life of the outdoors. Film offers an insidious, interior wilderness.

Despite the omens, for a city of its size (Seattle's population is about 500,000), there is an impressive amount of movie activity here, including an imaginative and enterprising film society, and an annual international film festival in its third year. Displaced Easterners I've talked to complain that there are too few serious films available in Seattle, that half a dozen long-running successes monopolize limited theater space. What they object to—a distribution system that avoids risk—is symptomatic of the film scene everywhere. Economics predominates esthetics. For all its provincial culture-chasing and middlebrow snobbery, there is probably more concern in Seattle for making available original and difficult films than in the large cities in the East. Much of the Seattle film scene exists for its own reward.

In my first month in Seattle, I caught a double bill of Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* and Samuel Fuller's *Pickup on South Street*, sponsored by the Seattle Film Society and shown in a makeshift auditorium in an old church. Subject matter would seem to be the only thing these films have in common, but Bresson's austerity and Fuller's

blatancy illuminate one another in surprising ways. Both films are about emotional deprivation. The Society, which also puts out an intelligent journal called *Movietone News*, concerns itself with showing films that are not readily available elsewhere. In the past season, one might have seen Godard's *Weekend* and *Pierrot le Fou*, Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar*, Murnau's *Tabu*, Sayajit Ray's *Distant Thunder*, Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (restored European version), Polanski's masterpiece, *Cul-de-Sac*, Bertolucci's *The Spider's Stratagem*, Douglas Sirk's remarkable use of black and white cinemascope, *The Tarnished Angels*, Renoir's *Boudu Saved from Drowning*, two rarely shown Hitchcocks, *Rich and Strange* and *Number Seventeen*, Max Ophul's *The Reckless Moment* and Frank Capra's *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* and *Dirigible*. The metal folding chairs, which provide the only seating, demand more uncompromising commitment than those of us with bad backs can readily sustain.

The most beautiful film house in Seattle is a converted mansion called the Harvard Exit (named after the sign on the freeway). The lobby of the Exit is an enormous parlor with comfortable chairs and couches, and an old piano almost in tune. Good coffee and spice tea are served without charge, and sometimes crackers and cheese, hors d'oeuvres before the main course. At times, the owner of the theater comes out and presumes to introduce the film as if he were its maker. Recently, I went to see *Padre Padrone* at the Exit. A friend, a young novelist from the East, said it was the best movie the Harvard Exit had ever shown. Maybe so. *Padre Padrone*, a work of considerable intelligence and invention, ran only two weeks, despite respectful reviews from the local press. It was replaced by a revival of *The Tall Blond Man with One Black Shoe*, the biggest moneymaker in the seven-year history of the Exit.

From May 11 to May 31, a theater called the Moore Egyptian, as exotic in its own tacky way as some of the Loew's palaces in New York City, hosted the Third Seattle International Film Festival, an event of considerable ambition and civic virtue. Fifty films were screened over a period of three weeks, including some American premieres and a number of films that had not yet been shown commercially in New York City. The festival opened with the mutedly sentimental *Madame Rosa* and closed with Wim Wenders' inside-out *film noir*, *The American Friend*. Both of these have had ample exposure in the East, particularly *Madame Rosa*, which won an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film of the past year. Among the highlights of the Seattle Festival were Sayajit Ray's *The Chess Players*, the restored version of Von Sternberg's *Anathan*, Tachella's *Voyage to Grande Tartary*,

Elaine May's *Mikey and Nicky*, Carlos Saura's *Cousin Angelica*, Fassbinder's *Effie Brest*, Shindo's horror classic *Onibaba*, Wajda's *The Promised Land*, Gunnel Lindblom's *Summer Paradise*, Pasolini's *Salo*, Herzog's *Heart of Glass* and Borwxyzk's *The Beast*. In addition, as a last-minute entry, there was a world premier of a film made in Seattle, called *Gas City*, which the program notes promise "will irretrievably put Seattle on the filmmaking map." Typically, provincial good will overstates itself.

Madame Rosa, the festival's most public gesture, is a tasteful, well-performed bit of what Truffaut called "The Tradition of Quality," a skillful mix of understated sentimentality and "important" social theme. This heart-of-gold French film is neither better nor worse than its long-running Hollywood counterparts, *Julia*, *Coming Home*, *The Turning Point*, and *An Unmarried Woman*, the real hits of the Seattle film scene. *The Turning Point*, in particular, playing in the University district, had lines around the block for eight months. Audiences in Seattle, as elsewhere, like their soap operas disguised with the patina of culture, and we have entered a period, or have been in it for several years, in which sentimentality passes for genuine feeling. *Madame Rosa* is *The Defiant Ones* of its day, a soulful Arab boy and a dying Jewish woman emotionally chained together while the vaudeville of the world goes on outside. Attractions like *Madame Rosa*, which bring in crowds, ostensibly make possible the showing of difficult and original films that lack a ready-to-wear audience.

One of these more original films is Werner Herzog's *Heart of Glass*, which I saw for the first time at the Lincoln Center Festival last fall. The messianic cynicism that informs Herzog's cinema is probably no more profound than the emotional uplift—love makes it all right in an otherwise thankless world—of *Madame Rosa*. The difference is that *Heart of Glass* is uniquely envisioned, is a serious work of art. Herzog has a cult following in Seattle, particularly among university students. Every seat in the capacious Moore was filled for the Festival showing of *Heart of Glass*, a buzz of expectation in the audience. The young audience, to my dismay, talked back to the picture, made oohs and ahhs of admiration and surprise. Their Herzog is not mine, but it nevertheless pleased me to see a filmmaker as uncompromising as Werner Herzog treated with the kind of respect the young usually reserve for the meretricious. My favorite Herzog continues to be *Every Man for Himself and God against All*, now being called *The Mystery of Kaspar Hauser*. Something in the sensibility of *Heart of Glass*, the pleasure it takes in its own cynicism, alternately repels and fascinates me.

I was pleased to see Elaine May's determinedly uncharming *Mikey*

and *Nicky* given another chance after its unheralded run in New York. A movie that makes as few concessions to its audience as this one can't be all bad. It is a film about two unpleasant thugs (Peter Falk and John Cassavetes) and the painful, sometimes comic implications of what is a metaphoric sibling rivalry. The film is full of the self-revealing behavior we are used to getting from Cassavetes and Falk in Cassavetes' own movies, the kind of self-revelation that ultimately hides more than it gives away. A nightmare film, *Mikey and Nicky* fails because May only rarely lets it escape its naturalistic frame.

Carlos Saura's *Cousin Angelica* is an ambitious failure of another sort, a film that mixes the remembered past and the enacted present as if they were contemporaneous realities. The same repressive Spanish Catholicism that has emotionally maimed the central character, the film insistently indicates, is responsible for the Fascist overthrow of the Republic. Saura, in the manner of the early Buñuel, lets the private story stand by symbolic implication for the public one, the two distorting mirrors of one another. Particularly effective is Saura's strategy of having his middle-aged protagonist appear as his adult self in his dramatized recollections of childhood. The effect is to give the recollected past a graven immediacy.

The movies large audiences are going to in Seattle are not the Festival films (*Madame Rosa* expected), but the same middlebrow hits that appear to be enchanting the urban East. What do *Julia*, *The Turning Point*, *An Unmarried Woman*, *Madame Rosa* and *Coming Home* have in common? They are all slickly produced, aspire to some primitive idea of sophistication and culture, have inspiring themes, are without a single original cinematic idea, and manipulate tears. These "quality" films are, at heart, interchangeable. In that reliable melting pot of memory, they merge into one. Disguises of plot aside, they all make the same fraudulent emotional appeals, enlisting us in the noblest causes, while falsifying significant particulars to avoid ambiguity. The admiring reviews these films have had, along with their popular successes, suggest that we have moved into a period in which sentimentality is willfully confused with emotional vitality. One despairs at the implications of such news. Exaggerated feeling is a disguise for no feeling, for numbness and cruelty.

Hal Ashby's *Coming Home*, the most recent and perhaps most admired of these films, is a classic representative of the Vogue of Sentimentality. As *Julia* is putatively anti-Fascist and *An Unmarried Woman* programmatically feminist, *Coming Home* is self-regardingly opposed to the Vietnam War. So as not to seem a one-cause film (like a one cause politician?) *Coming Home* affirms compassion and love and liberated sex, the immutable trendy verities. The apotheosis of the

heroine's liberation comes when she makes love (graphically, as if we needed to know how it might be done) with a handsome paraplegic (Jon Voight). As in most contrived works of this sort, the characters have no felt past, discover the world as if they were born the moment the film was threaded on the projector. No one apparently ever told the heroine (Jane Fonda) or her war-loving officer husband (Bruce Dern) that officers don't fraternize with enlisted men or officer's wives with enlisted men's women friends. The characters' behavior is in the service of the necessities of plot. In its pursuit of Truth, *Coming Home* is constrained to sacrifice particular truths. At the outset, when we need to be shown the implications of the war, the Jon Voight character is a wild man at the hospital, crazed with self-contempt. When the plot requires it, he is transformed into a figure of stability and wisdom, upon which the other physically and emotionally wounded rely. The film's main, thought disguised, concern—it is what we as audience are made to want—is the erotic coupling of the two central characters. When Fond's stiff-necked patriotic husband returns, we are faced with the conventional soap opera triangle. Instead of being outraged—true to character though banal as narrative—the broken-spirited officer takes his wife's betrayal as an indication of his own deficiencies. The Fonda character insists high-mindedly that she still loves her husband, has always loved him, though we've had no experience as audience of any love between them. The film manages to have it every way at every turn. *Coming Home* moves toward its resolution with a succession of cross-cuts in which we see alternately Dern prepare himself for a suicidal walk in the ocean and Voight tell a high school class about the horrors of Vietnam. Dern's plot-convenient death is meant to seem a casualty of the war, I imagine, a token illustration of Voight's moving lecture. The real message of course is that the husband is out of the way and that the wife and the sympathetic lover can now be together without violating the rules. *Coming Home* rewards our suffering with an implicit happy ending. The ingredients of manipulation are so blatant I'm surprised more hasn't been said about them—sex and inspirational content, eros and sentimentality, voyeurism with a catharsis of tears.

One further note. Almost all of the films of some distinction that played in New York City in the past year were eventually made available to Seattle audiences, either through the Festival or in commercial runs. At this writing, the Cinema 2 in New York City is announcing the American premiere of a minor French film called *Bonjour Amour*. The fact is that *Bonjour Amour* premiered in the Seattle Film Festival a month earlier. Provincialism is everywhere.

COMPOSURE AND DECOMPOSITION: THREE PIECES ON THE FICTION COLLECTIVE

A few years ago, serious novelists began to express their concern that the large commercial publishers were more devoted to cookbooks than fiction, that many fine novels were being shuffled through the labyrinth of mass distribution, that the publishers were only interested in movie options anyway. There is an element of perennial complaint to these charges, and it does seem true that the paranoia of the committed writer increases with the giantism of the publishers, and is compounded by the recognition that there are so many other good writers out there.

It was as a response to so bleak an outlook for fiction that a group of young novelists—Jonathan Baumbach, Ronald Sukenick, Peter Spielberg, Mark Mirsky and others, writers who had each done several books with the major houses—decided to represent themselves as the Fiction Collective, an outfit that by now has brought over twenty books to press in the past five years. The intention of the Fiction Collective has been to present to the public (through the distribution agencies of Braziller) outstanding fictions that might otherwise have gone unpublished by the publishing conglomerates, or that might have been printed by one of the numerous small independent presses contributing to the unprecedented expansion of creative expression, especially poetry, that started in the sixties. The number of books of competent quality that get published, or sometimes self-published, these days is higher than ever, and I suppose this particular resonance of democratic populism is as much a part of the music of our moment as Jimmy Carter and the new evangelicism.

The work put out by the Fiction Collective is experimental, and the best analogue for its efforts in publishing circles is the list published over the years by James Laughlin at New Directions. Almost all the books issued by the Fiction Collective have been formally innovative, perhaps a bit too self-consciously at times, part of a pleasing yet simultaneously irritating postmodernist fascination with the apparently inexhaustible variability of aesthetic form. The Fiction Collective writers belong to a larger contemporary artistic grouping that is partly identified by the complications of its idiom (among writers, figures like Borges and Burroughs, Barthelme, Pynchon,

Gaddis, Kosinski, Wurlitzer . . .). These writers sometimes seem more eager to play with form than to entertain with story, and their ambition is to capture the full chaos of consciousness rather than any orderly progression simulated by more linear and omniscient modes of storytelling. The avatars of this spirit were Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound who, at the century's turn, became the imaginative levers of an emerging artistic voice that would dominate the future. The literary lineage here goes to Poe and American grotesque, not just the pathetic weirdness of Anderson's Winesburg, but the more viciously embittered anger and frenzied mania of Nathaniel West's Los Angeles.

The writers in the Fiction Collective are old enough to have experienced as children the tail end of the Depression, and World War II. Their primary aesthetic influences are the theater games inspired by Artaud and Beckett (see Marianne Hauser's tour de force, *The Talking Room*), "new wave" cinema of filmmakers like Godard, pop art and the sense of audience reciprocation it invites, rock electronics, and what loosely may be called the liberation movement of the sixties. The group has been broadly anthropological in outlook, intrigued, for example, by the ways in which a South Pacific island tribe worshipped U.S. Air Force fliers and their planes while they were engaged in an unofficial occupation during the Vietnamese War. The politics of this group has been Left-progressive, but this was clearer ten years ago when the Left had an apparent standard. Now, strong political positions do not seem as fashionable as they were in the sixties, and the intricate theory of conspiracy on all fronts that informs many of our artists and intellectuals has not yet found its appeal with any large public.

The writers in the Fiction Collective continue the modernist priority of multiple perspectives and collage form, and they often test reality with an elaborate series of fictional games (which creates a sometimes baffling complexity that is uncongenial to direct political statement). These games rupture the surface texture of the prose with an idea of visual disorder that Cummings first popularized. Some of these tricks are as venerable as Sterne, some derive from Joyce, others may resemble McLuhanesque media gymnastics. Some Fiction Collective writers have used devices like double and triple columns, telegraphic headlines, concrete poems and photographs. All of this has been part of a general program to redefine the traditional masking functions of the persona, and to deepen the illusion of the writer's personal revelation as well as the reader's participation.

The result is a highly relative sense of the real, and considerable fluidity. Add to this an arbitrarily comic shifting of point of view and

the Dadaist impulse to shock through incongruous rearrangements of the formal elements that most readers take for granted, and what you get is a difficult style. The question for criticism becomes whether this difficulty is a logical extension of the art-for-art's-sake aesthetic that began in the 1890s—and in that case should readers struggle with a new formalism for the sake of historical obligation?—or whether it exists because of the way these writers see the world. And if conspiracy is our present *Zeitgeist* in the West—if the Kennedy assassinations, Nader's allegations, Watergate, and speculations on the international manipulations of the oil cartel represent clear cultural signals—then no wonder that so many contemporary artists have favored meshing modes of presentation. Experimental writers are supposed to be indecipherable, dazzling in the maze like Pynchon, or just plain obscure like John Hawkes, but the frequent explanation for difficulty as style is that political reality is just too contradictory and incredible to be perceived on any single level, and the complicating role of sophisticated technology adds new facets all the time. When some Saudi potentate executes his ward in a public square in Jeddah, or when the Director of the F.B.I. is allegedly a leader of a group called the Mysterious Order of Veiled Prophets in St. Louis, then the curious novelist may justifiably wonder about what cultural connections can be made. Of course, difficulty as style is not an inevitable handmaiden for multiplicity. While a writer like Pynchon may see incommunicability as the perfect response to the Muse lost in a maze (and so the reader's *amazement* at the intricacy of invention causes a meaningful identification), someone like Kurt Vonnegut happens along and employs similar devices while so rigidly simplifying ideas that they seem absurd. Furthermore, most good mainstream writers since Dos Passos have learned to integrate experimental devices as part of the expected architecture of their novels without calling attention to such devices for their own sake. The result has been to blur the old distinction between those who want primarily to entertain, and an avant-garde so compelled by the primacy of their visions that they cannot simplify form for any potential audience.

These considerations, and the connections I have tried to establish between members of the Fiction Collective and the larger community of experimental writers, are offered here in the interest of classification, but the occasion for these thoughts are two books published by the Fiction Collective, Peter Spielberg's *The Hermetic Whore* and Leon Rooke's *The Broad Back of the Angel*, as well as a more commercial possibility published by Alfred A. Knopf, Steven Millhauser's *Portrait of a Romantic*.

Peter Spielberg's collection of stories, *The Hermetic Whore*, shares many of the characteristics of recent experimental fiction—a thematic focus on auguries of apocalypse, a ribaldry intending to shock exclusively, a reliance on sexual fantasy as the supreme animation (a trait evident also in his novel, *Twiddledum, Twaddledum*). The point of departure is usually that of what has been called speculative fiction, where the writer's energy is more concerned with the twists and implications of the most bizarre possibilities than with character in action. So, in the title story, we encounter a program to encourage masturbation as a means of preventing anomie among the aged, in another story incestuous children adopt new parents, and in "Love's Hot & Cold Compresses" a couple becomes locked in a permanent coitus. While the conceptions are clever, the humor seems sensational rather than able to help us understand the ways of the world, and some of the sexual circumstance, as in "The Last Skirt Trick," will amuse only men. For me, the strongest part of the book is its final section, a sinister fable called "Dog Days," in which some guests at a dinner party meet a congregation of lifeless blacks on a roof, and a marvellous geneological triptych called "The Duration Of Life."

Leon Rooke's *The Broad Back of the Angel* is another well crafted collection of stories with a successfully bouyant sense of fantasy in three sketches about a surrealist magician, grim comedy in a pair of stories set in Mexico, and two superb pieces about antipathetic friends aging. The thematic link here is instances of failed love, and Rooke demonstrates a deft fluency in handling a woman's viewpoint. Both Rooke and Spielberg are capable of restraint as well as imagination, and they avoid the easy gimmicks and electronic kitsch that has marred some experimental writing lately. Although they are both interested in the comedy of sexual confrontation, it is usually not as much for erotic purpose as to emphasize the awkwardness and anxiety of relationship.

Which brings me to Steven Millhauser's *Portrait of a Romantic*, a substantial novel about the adolescence of Arthur Grumm, a bored, moody and perplexed product of the middle class. Millhauser is another gifted writer with good descriptive abilities and a finely developed sense of detail who is chiefly occupied, in this book, with the sensibility of maturation. Like Rooke, Spielberg, and most experimentalists, Millhauser romantically asserts that a work of fiction should "supplant the world" rather than render it exactly. Unlike Rooke and Spielberg, however, Millhauser tries to suppress the element of the grotesque and his ensuing mood can often be drab and unanimated. His adolescent enjoys precisely the kind of lugubrious melancholy that a writer like Spielberg would mercilessly burlesque. But Millhauser

takes his dreary young hero so seriously—his voyeurism, his fantasies of transgression in women's closets, his friendships with two junior high school chums who play ping pong, Monopoly, Russian roulette and even drink each other's blood (though without the gusto of Huck and Tom). The ambiance here is all drenched Poe with no sense of the frustrated passion and raging dream that makes the third chapter of *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* so authentic and gripping, and such a touchstone for the subject of adolescence in modern fiction. A further problem for me was that the narrator's voice seemed too sophisticated to allow the reader to feel the stumbling agony of manhood struggling to emerge, but capturing the voice of so vulnerable an age is a masterly ambition, as Henry James knew when he began the modern age of experiment in fiction with *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age*. Of these three books by Millhauser, Spielberg and Rooke, Millhauser's is the one that tries the hardest but succeeds the least. And I don't think it is a good prospect for the movies!

JOHN TYTELL

* * *

Desmond MacCarthy once grilled a young novelist concerning his motives for writing. Did he hope to become rich or famous or powerful? to attract beautiful women? to improve civilization? to move men's hearts? To each of these queries, with increasing perturbation, the author answers: "No, I wish only to write novels!" Exasperated himself, MacCarthy at last cries: "Then what will you write about? It looks to me as though your only subject will be the desire to write."

Doubtless, MacCarthy considered this crushing. But the authors of these three volumes of literary criticism, commentary, and interviews would be ready to answer that, for them and for the writers they value, the desire to write is indeed the proper subject for novels. *The New Fiction* consists of interviews by Bellamy and six others of a dozen novelists (Barth, Oates, Gass, Barthelme, Sukenick, Tom Wolfe, Hawkes, Sontag, Reed, Kosinski, Gardner, and Vonnegut). Klinkowitz discusses many of the same writers, as well as Baraka, James Park Sloan, Federman, and Gilbert Sorrentino. And Federman's book is a collection of critical disquisitions on the new fiction, with pieces written by many of the same novelists—here, as frequently, turned

critics—and also such closely associated European fictionists as Sol-lors, Calvino and Ricardou, and such defenders of surfiction as Kostelanetz and Jacques Ehrmann. For added critical support, Federman calls upon Jacques Derrida and the *Tel Quel* critics in France, and H. C. Artmann and his “Vienna Group.” These three books, indeed, make a varied and valuable little library of critical commentary on the new fiction, even if in their incestuous overlapping they do at times recall Robert Graves’s remark that the economy of the Scilly islanders was so impoverished they had to take in each others’ washing to survive.

In Federman’s words, “surfictionists” believe that “reality as such does not exist, or rather exists only in its fictionalized version”; and therefore they wish to write on (and about) “that level of man’s activity that reveals life as a fiction.” In their hands, the novel “will no longer be a representation of something exterior to it, but self-representation.” “Fictionists,” as Klinkowitz calls them, adhere to the conviction, furthermore, that while the new “non-genre novel” is thriving, the “traditional novel” is dead. They argue that: since reality is discontinuous, linear narrative lies; since personality is multiple and the idea of individuality is discredited, the idea of the hero (and indeed of character) is absurd. Story is “inessential”—or even, for Oswald Wiener, “a disgustingly bourgeoisie concept.” The suspension of disbelief is “distasteful.” Even the process of reading has become “boring” and “restrictive,” and thus the conventional methods of reading must be “demolished.” As Maurice Blanchot succinctly and with Gallic arrogance remarks, “when one encounters a novel written according to all the rules . . . one has not, of course, encountered ‘literature.’” The attacks upon the old novel and the defenses of the new in these three books seem to present surfictionists as an embattled crew of literary desperadoes.

This, however, is more a rhetorical appeal than an actual condition. By 1975, these new writers are firmly entrenched in one camp of the literary establishment. On the simplest level, they are successful. *Partisan Review*, *Fiction* (coedited by Barthelme) and *fiction international* (edited by Bellamy) print them; major journals review their books; major universities, from SUNY at Buffalo to the University of California, employ them. In literature, as in music and painting, experimental artists always pretend to be outsiders, but there is no doubt that surfictionists have had many victories in the battles for literary position. Klinkowitz repeatedly gives away his own deeply conventional bourgeois bias when he rejoices in the sales of Vonnegut

and Pynchon, notes that Kosinski has won a National Book Award and smugly observes that Vonnegut is “rumored to be a leading candidate for the Nobel Prize,” and predicts that soon “post-contemporary fictionists will establish their work as the major literary mode” and rule the field.

More generally, they are clearly part of a century-long tradition of avant-garde art. Experimental modernist writing since Baudelaire has proceeded on one basic assumption—that to advance, it must demolish the barriers existing between it and the other arts. Ishmael Reed rather naively remarks to his interviewer: “Writers will try to collaborate with other fields of art. Maybe this is what the new fiction is all about.” Burroughs’s experiments in merging literature with music, Sontag’s in doing so with cinema, Barthelme’s literary collage, Gardner’s cartoon-like compositions, and similar efforts, all follow a familiar pattern. These authors are applying to fiction the same reductive techniques—the rejection of narrative, for instance—by which poets of fifty years ago moved from Victorianism to modernism. They also mirror more recent tendencies in visual art—of the period 1967–78—to render painting reductively by emphasizing its conceptual or narrative bases, making painting entirely literary, as in John Baldessari’s work. Contrariwise, surfictionists strive to make literature anything *but* literary, pushing it toward music and painting or film, on the one hand, and toward theoretical criticism on the other. They do so, moreover, as part of the avant-garde tradition.

Philosophically, of course, they are part of an even older current of post-Kantian idealism, which in aesthetics proceeded through Croce and the New Critics to end reductively in Krieger’s contextualism. Sukenick arrived at his aesthetic through Wallace Stevens, while Federman was influenced by Beckett and the *Tel Quel*, and Gass by Wittgenstein. But all hold to idealistic-existentialist aesthetics that are very familiar, if not by now outright clichés, and thoroughly acceptable. Surfictionists and fictionist-critics so often give the reader what Bellamy calls “comprehensive ideological frames” instead of stories or characters because they recognize that it is much more agreeable to write about books that should be written than to write or read them. Indeed, they are sometimes so tired of fiction that they take the position reached by Gilbert Sorrentino in *Imaginative Qualities of Actual Things*: “the reader is asked to write the book that I have no interest in writing.” The reader could well do so since they are working in an easily recognizable aesthetic tradition.

Finally, surfiction is clearly a result of the cultural conditions

available to authors who arrived at artistic consciousness in the 1950s and early 1960s. It reflects a historical period characterized by personal affluence, social abundance, behavioral permissiveness, and political indifference, when there seemed to be no urgency for writers to participate in societal improvement or cultural redefinition. Artists were encouraged to develop theoretical sophistication and to assume privileged positions precisely because society did not, at the moment, seem to need them. Surfiction has not noticeably had an impact upon writers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where the writer must participate in the struggles of his culture.

Surfiction, then, has very clear roots and a large appeal for acceptance. Thus, we should be assessing its achievements. As Susan Sontag told Bellamy: "I think all the theories are plausible. It depends on what you do with them." Fiction is always a rearrangement of reality according to some principles. It may be a veil or a maze. As veil, it blurs the inessentials of social and psychological phenomena, exposing truths through imposing its special perspectives; it gives what William Carlos Williams called "the imaginative qualities of the actual things." It is designed to satisfy the writer and serve the reader. As maze, fiction proceeds from the intellect, taking, as Sukenick says, the "jigsaw puzzle" as its "model" and the self-gratification of the aesthetic intelligence as its object.

At its worst, surfiction is a maze—a "triumph of misplaced intelligence," a phrase used by Barthelme to characterize the work of Sollors, Butor and other French surfictionists. But the finest new fictionists—Sukenick, Kosinski, Reed, Gardner, and Barthelme—have produced fictive veils which insist both that the world can only be known through the imagination, and also that certainly it *must* be known.

One of the most interesting of these writers, Ronald Sukenick, asserts that he wishes to "bang" his audience with reality, to give them no escape. True, Sukenick offers, as Klinkowitz says, "the highest profile of theory." As aesthetician, he composes with his right hand, the instrument of intelligence; but as fictionist he consistently invents with the left hand, the hand of the dreamer. Like Sukenick, these writers often begin as surfictionists, pushing us into a maze, but at their best they change magically into fictionists. And when they make the maze a veil, they offer us again the truths of the imagination that fiction, new or old, was always designed to provide.

JAY MARTIN

* * *

Interruption. Discontinuity. Imperfection. It can't be helped. This very instant as I write as you read a hundred things. A hundred things to tangle with resolve ignore before you are together. Together for an instant and then smash it's all gone still it's worth it. I feel. This composure grown out of ongoing decomposition.

(Ronald Sukenick 98.6)

At a time when, so I am told, no work by such different but brilliant novelists as Stanley Elkin and William Gass (to take only two notable examples) is in print, such an enterprise as the writers' cooperative, Fiction Collective, must be welcomed and encouraged. Writers can no longer afford to ignore the whole mechanics of publication and distribution as being essentially technical matters outside their more creative concerns. It could be argued that their activity of producing books extends well beyond the completion of the manuscript and right into the marketplace where the central problem of the ownership of the modes of production is more clearly visible. It could well be that writers will have to participate—"intervene" is perhaps the preferred word of the day—in those modes to a far larger extent than hitherto. However, that is a problem for more detailed consideration than this piece can aspire to provide. Here I can only consider some aspects of a few of the books which have entered the market through Fiction Collective.

It should perhaps be said at the start that the work does not seem in any way to represent any particular group or coterie. This is not necessarily a wholly good thing since schools, groups, movements, often assertive and tendentious, have always contributed considerably to the self-transforming energy of literature. But at the moment it is surely not a wholly bad thing either. Here is Ronald Sukenick's sense of some aspects of the present moment, from his introduction to *Statements*, which contains short works by twenty-six different writers. "In a curious turnabout, writers in the seventies—those in this volume among them—have learned to profit from what is by definition an impossible situation. If everything is impossible, then anything becomes possible. What we have now is a fiction of the impossible that thrives on its own impossibility. . . . Taken together, the stories in this collection, which run the gamut from social realism to Surfiction,

emerge as reexamination of the premises of fiction, and a possible renewal of its forms." In a somewhat similar spirit, in a fairly recent interview Robert Coover said that he worked from "a sense that the apocalypse has already happened; now what do we do?; a sense that nothing has yet begun, man has not yet been created, but now this is possible at last." In that spirit he published a short story called "Beginnings," which opens with a writer who, in order to get started, shoots himself. His blood hits the wall and spells out this message: "It is important to begin when everything is already over."

One potential problem which can arise from this sense of the possibilities beyond impossibility is the erosion of the distinction between "anything is possible" and "anything goes." If you adopt a posture of highly tolerant eclecticism then perhaps anything does go, but, to continue in the same vein, not everything comes off. This is clearly preferable (to me) to any kind of censorship (apart from self-censorship, but that gets us into another large problem) and the will-to-exclude engendered by a rigid set of fixed criteria which determines what goes and what, as it were, does not. I know about "repressive tolerance" but it is obviously (again to me) distinctly preferable to repressive repression (a few weeks in eastern Europe hardly prompted me to question this preference). Of course there is always the risk of overvaluation in dealing with a contemporary text but then I think the whole matter of how we do, can, should read and discuss contemporary literature adds up to yet another large problem not to be tackled here. As a general point, however, I would say that I think we will have to be more consciously willing to accept the possible ephemerality of much (all? who knows) of the contemporary literature we read. This need not inhibit us from responding to it enthusiastically in the present moment, the context within which and for which it was produced. We should not be cautiously trying to spot the winners, who, as it were, will make it to the finishing line of eternity. A book may engage us vividly now which, when looked at in ten years' time, may seem to have lost its lustre and particular energy. Doubtless it has—which does not mean it never had them. (This, incidentally, is why I was not very engaged by Mimi Albert's *The Second Story Man*, which is about love and poverty in the East Village of New York and centres on a somewhat mythologised—to me sentimentalised—radiant failure named Florian and his destructive relationship with a girl named Mary. As a book it has its insights and accuracies and you can recognize the "feel" of New York in the late 1950s—a certain kind of rather manic desperation is caught quite well. But I felt that I had read it about, well, ten or even

fifteen, years ago and it didn't do very much for me now.) Nevertheless there is clearly the danger of admitting some very slack and ill-considered writing on the "anything goes" principle. If *no* constraints are posed or recognised, no focussing problems addressed, no binding aims accepted, then a writer really is a "creature at the mercy of language" (to adopt Lacan's somewhat extreme formulation) no matter how much he may think he is disrupting the rubricising tendencies of conventional usage by turning his text into a linguistic playground—since how can he choose one word rather than another? The words will choose him, or rather the noise will. There are a few pieces in *Statements* which seem to me to have been chosen by the noise side by side with some splendidly unusual pieces which can displace, disturb and delight us without having recourse to mere incoherence.

One novel which seems to be written on the "anything goes" principle—though certainly not written by the noise—is Clarence Major's *Reflex and Bone Structure*. "I want this book to be anything it wants to be. A penal camp. A bad check. A criminal organization. . . . I want the mystery of this book to be an absolute mystery. Let it forge its own way into the art of deep sea diving. Let it walk. I want it to run and dance. And be sad. . . . This book can be anything it has a mind to be." This must be a deliberate echo of Ishmael Reed: "no-one says a novel has to be one thing. It can be anything it wants to be, a vaudeville show, the six o'clock news, the mumblings of wild men saddled by demons" (*Yellow Back Radio Broke Down*). But that is all part of the way the book has a mind to be, since it is full of echoes just as it is in part a haze of images which pour out of the TV and the cinemas, endlessly constituting and reconstituting whole areas of contemporary consciousness. ("I watch television. It slushes back and forth before me. In the afternoon TV is dull shit and it lodges you in its dullness; yet it gives you a weird sort of vegetable sort of copout security." "We leave the theater. The screen follows us.") The writer/narrator confesses that he would very much like to be "*out of his mind*"; as it is he is too much *in* it and there's too much in there with him. He is writing his own kind of mystery story concerning a black actress and two other figures who are all, as he keeps reminding himself, simply his lexical inventions (some of whom he likes better than others—fair enough). He works in and with fragments (Barthelme echoes can be heard) and some sense of the precariousness of his undertaking seems to be inscribed in the inserted comment—"You're figure skating near the border. You're arrested for being too fragmented." In a sense he is trying to keep his composure in the present ("all around me is terror and in it people

move”) and he strives for this by continuous acts of decomposition so that the text never jells. Rather, it keeps blinking, and with every blink it is doing something else. “This novel has to keep changing. Hornbeam trees should stand tall in it. Characters should beat drums. Beloved friends should arrive at airports. . . .” and so on. That there is another side to this strategy of constant metamorphosis emerges in a later comment. “Changes. Nothing seems to stop changing; things slide or bump into things. I can’t speak anymore.” But by metamorphosing his own role the narrator keeps on writing, now as undertaker, burying and commemorating his dead characters, now as detective trying to apprehend the plot of his own plot, now a tour guide. “I take people through many changes, across state lines, into new zones.” I am inclined to accept the offered metaphor and assert that the book is well worth the trip.

Things in Place is made up of a series of short stories in which things get to be very much out of place, or into new, unexpected and often rather disturbing places. In one story a golf ball poacher (sic) starts walking into a lake at night in search of his loot, moving from secure shallows to unnegotiable depths. Suddenly—“there’s no bottom! He’s farther out than where he dived, and there’s a drop in this lake, as there is in every lake and pond in our land. These drop-offs remind the unwary that *small things hide whole mysteries*. The drop-off is crude, but it has the quality; we’re reminded of endless lines, special yearnings, tilted hills, knobless doors, immense cheeses, sudden circles, swastikas in a row, blue stones, giant mushrooms” (my italics). Jerry Bumpus’ stories exploit the proposition I have italicised and contain just such lexical drop-offs so that the reader, wary or unwary, finds himself as they say, displaced. Partly it’s a matter of moving from daylight clarities to twilight and nocturnal zones in which things take up new places, very often to our considerable dis-composure. “All day he’s aware of the placid jury of clocks looking on, he feels the homage of desks and swivel chairs, and with acquaintances all day he gets and gives, and has careful conversations with strangers. Things usually stay put and when there’s a slip he looks the other way. But nights in bed he closes his eyes and gives over—it all must end and begin again! . . . Till dawn he tries to find his way home, stumbling through such debris it’s as if the soup of the universe had sloshed out some of its logic for him to study.” Of course these strategies are familiar from the work of the surrealists and as with any surrealism there is always the danger of a merely facile weirdness which can quickly bore. But with one or two exceptions these stories do seem to shift us briefly “over into that loose

dark air where everything happens." Itemisation of stories is pointless but I would single out one called "Away in Night" which hinges on a man's obsession with wolves which he is sure he can see encircling his house. His dread mounts until he sees one enormous wolf leaping through the door at him. The drop-off point comes when we suddenly realise the man is blind. And "Our Golf Balls" is a very good example of Jerry Bumpus' ability to release some of the mystery in the small thing. It imagines the sensations of the golf ball "silently squealing its terror through space" and what it must be like to be poised at the edge of the final hole: "imagine looking into a hole, lit by tiny pinpoint light bulbs, four inches wide and a mile deep. If you have succeeded in this, next imagine you are a golf ball. (Densely round. Squint. Clench your teeth.) Ready? Fall." And so we do.

When the great bourgeois novel began to hit its stride there was much interest in what was called "the condition of England" question. The preoccupation has shifted very much to the "condition of language" problem. Thus, for example, the following declarations from *Statements*: "I have always thought that all life networks that enable us to proceed wherever we are going, or prevent us from doing so, are predicated on a system called language" (Walter Abish, author of *Alphabetical Africa*). "This country was made by people who were busy losing a language. The result has been a kind of affectless, musicless school English. One of the things going on is the struggle to discover our language. Not style, use of language. Something about energy, about knowing" (Eugene Wildman). Nothing very new in this, to be sure, whether you care to think of Saussure or Mark Twain. But I think the absolutely foreground position occupied by aspects of language is a distinguishing feature of contemporary American fiction. What makes it different from other contemporary fictions with a similar preoccupation is the nontheoretical nature of most American probes into the mysteries and magics of the word. Where French writers are usually cerebral American writers tend to be much more visceral. The sheer physicality of much recent American writing is a notable accompaniment to the focus on the word. The body, in many of its most extreme postures, is seldom off the page; just as, the feeling goes, the page is never off the body, since wherever we turn we are in text of some kind or another. To take just one example from the material under review, there is in *Statements* a very imaginative piece called "Jean Lambert Tallien: A Brief Romance" by Frederic Tuten (from a work in progress). This recounts the conventional biographical data concerning the French Revolutionist but goes off into meditative

amplification and interpolations, extending and retelling a life which was so notably concerned with writing (Tallien invented the *journal-affiche*), violence (he initiated the movement against Robespierre and was very active during the Terror), and passion (he conceived a great love for the aristocratic Therèse). At one point Tuten imagines Tallien's interpretation of a story by Washington Irving, then adds: "I do wonder, however, whether Tallien's exegesis has any base in the text, or whether, as with so many men of action, themes in the text of one's own life are not unknowingly projected into the fabric of the art-work experienced. We tend to seek in literature mirrors or explanations of our Self, unless we skill ourselves to separate our own blood from another's text." The shifting relationships between blood and texts is just that area of inquiry in which a lot of contemporary American fiction is working, with very exciting, if necessarily highly variable, results. (I single out Tuten because he is new to me and his piece is particularly attractive, but *Statements* contains other interesting work by such writers as Jonathan Baumbach, Jerome Charyn, B.H. Friedman, Israel Horovitz, Maureen Howard, Ronald Sukenick and others which I have no space to comment on.)

Still with language there is a story in the collection by Russell Banks called "That"—including, appropriately, a quotation from Gertrude Stein—which simply and subtly traces some of the problematical changes in the relationship between a boy and a girl. Particular attention is given to that deterioration through repetition which afflicts the terms employed in the endless discussions they have about their relationship. "They lost language—the new explanations always canceled the terms of the predecessors, sealing the old words off, letting them lie in piles in the past, gradually converting there into pockets of stale gas. . . . Some of the words and phrases used-up, exhausted of meaning, canceled-out, or otherwise lost, were . . ."—then follows a long list ranging from "*trust*" to "*regeneration*." Again, in his story, "*Impasse*," Banks gives an account of a married man who finds himself in the morally impossible position of not loving his wife but feeling he should not leave her. He explains this in careful analytic terms to a new girl friend. "He told her mainly of his dilemma, little else. As it turned out, Rosa seemed interested in little else, seemed almost eager to have him continue speaking of his marriage in the abstract, problematic terms he so adored." The displacement of "affect" into terminology is a phenomenon, or an affliction, which Banks portrays very deftly. His collection of stories, *Searching for Survivors*, is indeed a very satisfying and impressive volume which holds its shape while offering various

modulations into a different narrative key, so that stories in a relatively conventional mode about life in New Hampshire and Massachusetts alternate and mingle with slightly surreal pieces referring to Ché, and again with strange unlocatable pieces which are indeed set out almost like abstract problems, with an eerie atmosphere which seems to place them at a metaphysical distance while at the same time making them seem oddly close to home: ("The Investiture," "The Nap," "The Lie," and—a marvellous one in a rather Pirandelloesque mood—"The Masquerade"). A good example of Banks' unobtrusive skills is "With Ché at Kitty Hawk," which focusses on the feelings of a woman who has just left her husband in an attempt to start a "new life," only to realise that she has entered a new form of "entrapment"—a familiar enough theme, perhaps, but here handled with unusual nuance and understanding as Banks traces out the ensuing feelings. The final episode consists of a visit to the Wright Brothers Museum, where the sense of their achievement gives the woman a plausibly epiphanic exhilaration, and a determination to make some kind of knockabout flying machine of her own "out of the junk of her life so far." "Then as if a wonder were unfolding before her eyes, filling her with awe, she saw a large, clear image of the two men from the midwest, their clumsy wire, wood and cloth aircraft, the sustained passion, the obsession, which was the work, their love for it and for each other. It was like discovering a room in her own house that she had never before suspected even existed, opening a door that she'd never before opened, looking in and seeing an entire room, unused, unknown, altering thoroughly and from then on her view of the entire house." Banks' stores have just such an effect, opening up new areas of domestic space which we didn't know were in the house. The collection is nicely framed by two stories concerning, precisely, searches for survivors. The first recalls the fate of the explorer, Hudson, and imagines searching for that unfortunate captain of the *Discovery* who was set adrift by his own crew. The last moves to the present with a train crash in California and the loss of a young boy in the wreckage. A search is made of the "devastated site" but it is suddenly realised how futile it is. "It looked like a place where a war had been lost." The search goes on at the fictional level as the author opens other doors, quietly recording what does survive—and what does not.

I must confess that I had some trouble with Mark Mirsky's *The Secret Table*, though it was clearly written with passion at a high level of intensity. In describing it I can't do better than the blurb which, for once, I will quote. "Mark Mirsky sets side by side two novellas of young

men embracing a mystical past. In 'Dorchester, Home and Garden,' a thirty-year-old adolescent, Maishe, returns to a burnt-out Jewish district on Blue Hill Avenue. He is swept up by angels and dropped among the bums of the Boston Common, in a city through which Isaiah and the Greek philosophers wander. 'Onan's Child' recasts this narrator as the biblical Onan, who refused to sleep with his wife, Tamar. It is a tale of a kabbalistic world where angels go astray and the clay of the earth, still warm, cries out for human seed." That is an exactly precise, noninflationary description of the book and it depends on how you react to the densely kabbalistic atmosphere evoked by the prose, which is full of biblical formulations ("And it came to pass" and so on) and is written in that sort of self-enrapturing incantatory style not uncommon in mystical writings. It is what might be called a cornucopian style: "... ferns lashing our posteriors, the courtyard seething like a Shawmut Ave. back lot in July, tropical undergrowth crosses with the seedings of the Library matrons, Indian vines wind about us, her breasts sprout into long yellow squash, her behind into a grand orange pumpkin, and my stick is gold, crimson, black, and blue, a pole of colored corn. Barbara, all Boston is coming to fruit!" The first novella certainly does convey all kinds of childhood panics and anxieties and sadnesses and intensities along with the bewilderment of it all, and there is in both novellas a strong sense of the root mystery of generation and the figures of the mother and the father which, respectively, terminate the two stories. The retelling of the story of Onan is intermittently quite powerful as it explores the solipsisms and disconnections involved in the failure of desire. "Better blood than seed on your hands—better to cut the throat and taste life bubbling in than know the sad separations of dream and its dross." I think it is probably the high saturation of kabbalism which gives me trouble, along with those angels and philosophers on the loose. I take it that we all, to varying degrees, like the kind of spilt lyricism of Chagall's paintings, but the lyricism of Mirsky's book seemed at times to have had a bomb explode inside it. It is a book I read with respect but with a certain sense of exclusion and confusion. It is a book full of secrets and perhaps it keeps too many of them.

In Ronald Sukenick's *98.6* we are again engaged in some of the multiple aspects of language and desire, or one might say, some of the related problems generated by linguisticity and lubricity. "He wants to write lyrics without words that presents a tough problem for a songwriter because he knows we live in words words are the water we swim in he wants to move to the subverbs is the way he puts it and he

can't even move his vowels. See it's hard." The vowels/bowels joke and colloquial allusion to a general constipation is characteristic of the way the physical and the lexical are constantly intermingled. The search is for "the extraordinary in the body/word realm—"he now understands that they were confusing sex with the extraordinary but it's not sex that's extraordinary it's the extraordinary that's extraordinary." From the narrative point of view the book moves through three phases, with a section on Frankenstein, which is referred to as "The Dynasty of the Million Lies" (i.e., society as it was at the end of the sixties); an account of an experimental commune named the Monster ("He wants to go back but he knows there's no point until our monster is bigger than their monster. Or more terrible. That's a possibility"); and a vision of a utopian kibbutz called Palestine, which is really an attempt to create, or induce, an alternative nonmonstrous state of mind even while describing it. The whole book, which uses many different modes of presentation—diary entries, collages, fragments held together by the Mosaic Law ("the Mosaic Law is the law of mosaics a way of dealing with parts in the absence of wholes"), represents an ongoing effort to get into a new place, as it were, while recognising that you can't and shouldn't forget the concentration camps, the actual brutalities of our world, the myriad abuses and degradations of people in everyday life. It is a book that says "no exit" and "way out" at the same time: "Because there's a sense to their whole thing of new beginning and last chance even though in fact there are no new beginnings and no last chances." The pleasure of the book—and it really does give pleasure, which is an important factor—is that it deals with all kinds of potentially heavy things with a light touch. There is obviously a danger here of trivialising or simplifying complex matters, but there is an antiportentious spontaneity about the text, which allows glimpses of deep feelings and serious matters while keeping the reader easily on the move. It achieves this in part by exploiting some of those simultaneities and discontinuities, referred to in the quotation at the start of this review, in a Sterne-like manner. It is rather like the girl's tapestry (in the book) which uses ten different yarns and is "completely openended." In doing this the book risks ephemerality, or, better, it accepts ephemerality and works within the paradox of composing amidst decomposition: "tying up my novel AT THE SAME TIME my life is unravelling AT THE SAME TIME the novel is bungled fragments stitched together AT THE SAME TIME everything is seamless"—just a couple of the "luminous coincidences" from a whole stream of them which concludes the book with a rush of synchronici-

ties. It (the book) takes this risk because it wants to avoid becoming “hard,” “flat” (“Nazis are flat. Hells Angels are flat. . . . Death is flat”), “Aztec” (“Aztec equals monolith. Maya equals rise and fall rise and fall rise and fall.”) It is a book which wants to be young and gentle, and to go out to play and love without causing pain. But it is not a book which just goofs off and there is obviously a very accomplished writer at play-work here.

In one of its main concerns it can be said to express a feeling or need which is quite widespread in America today, albeit it does so in its own particular manner. There’s nothing new about feeling trapped in language, and writers like William Burroughs have long been trying to blow up the word-lines. What Sukenick is after is some kind of impossible other language, or a language hidden within the existing language to be used for communicating in a new way. “This language is called Bjorsq. While Bjorsq is obviously inconvenient for many purposes it has one great advantage—when two Lunks meet and speak in Bjors they understand one another perfectly. . . . Of course Bjorsq isn’t very exact you couldn’t write a textbook in it it expresses nothing with any definition but that’s the price you pay. It defines little but it says everything. That’s why you pay the price.” This is itself a form of play and would fit in with Sukenick’s ideas about “Bossa Nova” fiction as outlined in a *PR* article some time ago. It is part of a more serious desire to find the way into some “secret language,” which will open up old magics and new possibilities not currently inscribed in our texts. Such a language would help to establish the State of Israel, which, in this book, is not so much a political entity as a state of the imagination. “Without the State of Israel life would become inconceivable it would lose a necessary dimension it would become flat we would all become Nazis. Yet the trouble is that the State of Israel is itself almost inconceivable. First of all they speak Hebrew there a language most of us don’t understand . . .” and he goes on to show that in such a secret language “wisdom is dangerously close to nonsense”—indeed in a completely secret language it would necessarily be indistinguishable from it. But the arcane Hebrew spoken in this particular State of Israel I take to be Sukenick’s metaphor for a language which might enable us to “dream other dreams, and better,” in Mark Twain’s words. Bjorsq is hardly a solution to the “condition of language” problem, as Sukenick very well knows (I hope); but, as his own novel demonstrates, in this as in various other matters, raising the question is part of the answer.

TONY TANNER

BOOKS

ANTI-SEMITES AND JEWS

ON THE EDGE OF DESTRUCTION: JEWS OF POLAND BETWEEN THE TWO WARS. By Celia S. Heller. Columbia University Press. \$14.95.

Before the Second World War Poland was the home of more than three million Jews (about 10 percent of the country's population—not the only thing that reminds one at certain points of America's blacks), members of a community that had been there since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, achieving a history and cultural autonomy unique among Europe's Jews. After the war, about 50,000 Jews survived on Polish soil, but along with the effects of twentieth-century Polish nationalism and brutal Nazi extermination, and a 1968 *coup de grace* by the Communist regime sealed even this surviving remnant's fate. Today there are perhaps 10,000 Jews left in Poland, most of them aging and dying, many "passing" and hoping for invisibility. The goal towards which the Polish government and large portions of the population—supported by the Church and the universities—so clamorously yearned between the wars—a Poland free of Jews—has become a reality, as Celia Heller notes grimly in her fine study. That the Poles and the Polish nation are no better off than they ever were is an irony lost on none but the Poles themselves, perhaps—the sickest Polish joke in history.

Utilizing a rare knowledge of both Yiddish and Polish sources, Professor Heller invokes the spirits of Weber, C. Wright Mills and E. H. Carr by combining an account of this bitter history with sociological analysis. At its best her work recalls and might well be accompanied by a reading of Singer's *Family Moskat*: both writers work from within a deep knowledge of the people, and neither sentimentalizes nor backs away from the disturbing implications for Jew and non-Jew of their fate. In doing so, they allow us to experience that doomed community in all its reality—the profoundest tribute they can pay to it.

The first half of Professor Heller's book deals with the objective situation of Poland's Jews, which means the complex historical development of that community in good times and bad, their social definition (that of an inferior caste, and ultimately of a conquered nation), the pattern of oppression in our century that culminated in a policy of organized terror, abuse, exclusion. The second half shows the Jewish response to their situation: the orthodox moving from traditional accommodation patterns toward politicization (ultimately useless), assimilationists struggling against ethnic consciousness (only to return to it finally), the majority acculturating somewhere between tradition and assimilation, and the Socialists, Communists, Zionists militantly resisting oppression. The essential paradox was that Jewish life was undergoing a profound transformation from a homogeneous to a heterogeneous culture—the impact of a belated Enlightenment tore apart families, introduced secularism and modernism everywhere, impelled the youth towards socialism and Zionism—at the precise time that the Poles increasingly disregarded any notion of heterogeneity among Jews, seeing them only as foreign, dangerous, the enemy of true Polish nationhood.

The depth and obtuseness of Polish Jew-hatred has to be seen to be believed. In 1936 the Primate of Poland came out in support of the government's anti-Jewish campaign with a pastoral letter that read, in part, as follows:

A Jewish problem exists, and will continue to exist as long as the Jews remain Jews. . . . It is a fact that the Jews fight against the Catholic Church. They are free-thinkers and constitute the vanguard of atheism, of the Bolshevik movement and of revolutionary activity. It is a fact that Jewish influence upon morals is fatal, and their publishers spread pornographic literature. It is true that the Jews are committing frauds, practicing usury, and dealing in white slavery. It is true that in schools the influence of the Jewish youth upon the Catholic youth is generally evil, from a religious and ethical point of view. But—let us be just. Not all Jews are like that.

The good Cardinal goes on to deplore the beating up of Jews as being un-Christian, but the damage has been more than done. The fact is that instead of restraining the persecution of Jews the Church actively supported it. The nightmare of contemporary history from which we cannot awaken is that this same church can be seen as, and often is, in the condition of Poland's continuing oppression, a bastion of national aspiration and even of liberalism. It must be added, however, that Pope John Paul II had a good record as a civilian in the

anti-Nazi resistance and as Cardinal Wojtyla was friendly and sympathetic to Krakow's Jews.

As for the State: on the eve, practically, of the Nazi invasion, the emigration of Jews was considered a key agenda item by Poles at a London conference, and in May 1939 a government spokesman reiterated that nothing had changed in the policy towards Jews, saying "we expect to diminish the number of Jews in Poland." These stupid leaders all but betrayed their country's best interests by playing this old game instead of preparing against the Nazis. It is impossible to forgive Church, State, nation for the total lack of physical and moral support, as Professor Heller maintains, with which the Jews had to face their final martyrdom. The outrage continues today—not much guilt is evident in Polish society as almost all evidence of a Jewish presence and suffering have been effaced or scarcely acknowledged.

One rehearses this melancholy story in order to recall and better understand the moral and historic weight supporting the idea of a Jewish nationalism. It should be self-evident by now that there is a specifically Jewish peoplehood and destiny, but certain kinds of third world and New Left attacks upon Israel (even when an effort is made, for whatever reason, to separate "Jew" from "Zionist") have placed the question of the nature of Jewish nationalism once more before us.

The Jewish Left in Poland—Socialist, Bund, Communist—earns high marks for its determined resistance to anti-Semitism, in which it was often joined by their non-Jewish comrades, the only Poles, by and large, who consistently opposed anti-Semitism. But of course that was not done in the name of Jewish nationalism, which was invariably seen as a reactionary force, but against what was regarded as a diversion from class struggle. Anti-Semitism was seen as a phenomenon that rested on an economic underpinning—change that and the disease would surely disappear. Along with, naturally, a specifically Jewish presence in the brave new world. I repeat these platitudes only because the same simplicities seem to inform many Left arguments at present. In Poland very few people on the Left thought through or were comfortable with a truly pluralistic notion of culture, one that envisioned real autonomy, giving full weight to the realities that bound a people as *they* saw and determined them. Jewish Socialists and Communists failed, ultimately, to reach the Jew in the street because of their intransigent anticlericalism and the opposition to Zionism (in this regard, the Bund was even worse, according to Heller, than the Communists). The mass of ordinary Jews understood, in their despair and desperation, a truth about their condition that many of the non-

Zionists only belatedly embraced. As the situation for Jews became more vicious in Germany and Poland and the world only looked on or closed their doors against the desperate Jews, they perceived that the only hope lay in clearing out.

In the long run European anti-Semitism, the starting point of classical Zionism, may indeed prove not inseparable from European Christian civilization. Perhaps Christianity and European culture can still change sufficiently to eliminate any remains of the old virus, thus vitiating one impulse behind Jewish nationalism, although a more positive starting point for that nationalism may be the perception of a Jewish life as an alternative to the alienating one offered by European civilization. It is possible—in the long run. Meanwhile, in the short run, as we have learned—the Final Solution took less than four years—it was all over for the Polish Jews and most of the rest of Eastern Europe. After that experience, the notion of putting aside presumably short-term Jewish interests for benefits in some rosy future is unthinkable.

Yet the desperate Polish experience raises another cruel paradox. Granting them independence, Wilson and the League forced Poland to sign a Minorities Treaty, guaranteeing the cultural autonomy and rights of the Byelorussians, Ukrainians and Jews (one third of postwar Poland consisted of ethnic minorities). The poles bitterly resented this treaty as an imposition upon them and their national honor. Instead of opting for a federal system, as the Czechs did successfully under Masaryk, within a decade they had abrogated the terms of the agreement. Poland's pursuit of a homogeneous nationhood and the rejection of cultural pluralism led it inevitably to weakness, shame and dishonor. The old League idea was not a bad one; perhaps in our time it is even more apparent that all nationalisms must be mediated by a proper international regard for all minority and human rights.

The saddest irony I am led to reflect upon is that in the Jewish homeland it appears to be impossible to allow another long-suffering people, the Palestinian Arabs, true and complete cultural autonomy. One knows how difficult and dangerous such a course would be, and that previous offers of its equivalent (at independence and by early Left Zionists) have been rejected, but Jews, in Israel and out, ought not eliminate it from their agenda.

JULES CHAMETZKY

FROM MODERNISM TO STALINISM

THE LIFE OF THE AUTOMOBILE. By Ilya Ehrenburg. Urizen Books, Inc. \$8.95.

Prompted in part by the interest of current Russian exile literature, the West has begun to rediscover Russian modernist fiction of the twenties and its most gifted exponents: Viktor Shklovsky, Velimir Khlebnikov, and, oddly enough, Ilya Ehrenburg. Ehrenburg is still remembered today as a cultural personality, but his novels are, for the most part, forgotten. The recent republication of an early novel, *The Life of the Automobile*, reminds us that Ehrenburg, at his best, was a surprisingly good writer.

Ehrenburg was born in Kiev in 1891 to middle-class, assimilated Jewish parents. Exiled by the Czarist government in 1908, he settled in Paris, where for the next ten years he led a cosmopolitan life in the company of such friends as Picasso, Modigliani, Léger, Aragon, Pascin, and Max Jacob. On this return to Russia in 1918, Ehrenburg's attitude toward the revolution was, at the least, ambivalent: "I entertained many doubts" is the way he puts it in his *Memoirs*. The maverick revolutionary Victor Serge recalls in his own *Memoirs* that, in 1918, "a small volume by Ehrenburg (now on the run) was in circulation; it was *A Prayer for Russia*, so ravished and crucified by the revolution." At best, the Soviet government considered Ehrenburg to be what Trotsky called a literary fellow-traveler.

In 1921, Ehrenburg left for Berlin. There he joined the Russian exile community that, during the early twenties, would include Gorky, Pasternak, Biely, Mayakovsky, Khlebnikov, Shklovsky, Tsvetayeva, Esenin, and the young Nabokov. He published nineteen books during this decade—his best work and some of his worst as well. By the late twenties, Ehrenburg's opposition to the Soviet government had waned and, by the early thirties, he was *Izvestia's* correspondent in Western Europe.

Ehrenburg was one of the many European intellectuals for whom the rise of fascism in the 1930s effectively quelled scruples about the Soviet regime. The accommodation made, Ehrenburg—who knew personally almost every important writer and artist of his period—was the logical choice to be the chief organizer of the most successful

Communist-sponsored gathering of intellectuals ever brought off: the international Writers' Conference against Fascism, held in Paris in 1935. As *Izvestia's* correspondent, he covered the Spanish Civil War, partly in the company of Hemingway. In 1940, Ehrenburg returned to Russia for good. "The fall of Paris," Nadezdha Mandelstam recalls in *Hope Abandoned*, "was like a personal tragedy for him and made him quite oblivious to the reign of terror also reigning in Moscow. In this unfamiliar world, Ehrenburg was a changed person." During World War II, Ehrenburg did anti-German radio broadcasts of memorable virulence and, as a journalist, accompanied the Red Army on its drive toward Berlin.

After the war, Ehrenburg was one of the first Russians to raise a critical voice. His novel *The Storm* (1947) had some bitter things to say about Russian anti-Semitism. In 1953, he began to publish articles on the condition of Soviet literature and launched the first attack on the doctrine of socialist realism, holding it directly accountable for the mediocrity of Soviet writing. That same year, he wrote *The Thaw*, in which he contrasts the hacks who conform to party dictates with an artist who will not compromise despite official disfavor. From 1953 on, Ehrenburg was the patron and defender of a more liberal policy in the arts. The works of Babel and Tsvetayeva reappeared under his sponsorship, while his own *Memoirs*, published in the early sixties, exposed a generation of Russians to officially proscribed varieties of Western art and literature.

Many Western critics have viewed Ehrenburg as an "official" Soviet writer whose eminence is due more to a keen sense of which way the wind was blowing than to his own literary merits, and as the author of a (typically) self-exculpatory book of reminiscences. But this is being rather too hard on Ehrenburg. Ehrenburg remained Mandelstam's friend to the end, as Nadezdha Mandelstam attests in *Hope Against Hope*; and his polemics and activities from 1953 on (he died in 1967) in defense of artistic freedom were acts of considerable courage.

Ehrenburg knew that his conformism had ruined him as an artist—that knowledge pervades his *Memoirs*. But during the 1920s, living mostly abroad, he was close to the most valuable artistic tendencies of his time. The result was a range of work that included daring, complex novels like *Julio Jurenito* (1921) and *The Life of the Automobile* (1929), as well as such startling failures as the neo-Gorkian novel set in the slums of Moscow, *Protochny Lane* (1926) and the potboiler romance, *The Loves of Jeanne Ney* (1924), on which Pabst based his famous film starring Louise Brooks.

In *The Life of the Automobile*, which has recently appeared in English for the first time, Ehrenburg appraises the modern energies through the effects of technology. It is a consistent rendering of the Constructivist ideas of the 1920s—a nonfiction novel made up of anecdotes garnered from newspapers, public records, the history of objects. As the title suggests, the car is the main character, more alive than the human characters.

A highway. A long string of cars. Inside the cars, of course, there were people. The man was driving because he was a doctor. That one because he was after a girl. That one was selling lightbulbs. And that one had decided to kill a jeweler. All of them were driving, the cars were driving, and the cars were driving because they were cars.

Most of *The Life of the Automobile* is concerned with the capitalist incarnation of the car: how the workers are exploited, how consumerism grows, how great entrepreneurs like Citroen, Morgan, and Deterding think and operate. But Ehrenburg's indictment of the machine age is not confined to the West. In the last section of the novel, Ehrenburg describes Boris K., a Soviet oil executive. After his girlfriend commits suicide by throwing herself under his car, K. decides: "He mustn't think of Musya. Musya no longer existed. Period. Paragraph. Only one thing existed: his work, petroleum—for all time." What is remarkable is that Ehrenburg—in 1929—wanted to show the similarity between Communist Russia and the capitalist West. He realized that cars, oil, rubber were the real forces to be reckoned with in a machine-dominated world, whatever the ideology of a particular country.

At first glance, *The Life of the Automobile* might seem to resemble Futurist fiction, but where Marinetti welcomed a human sensibility "renewed" and a world transformed by technology generally and by the car in particular, Ehrenburg's novel mocks the machine age and pictures the car as a scourge. But although Ehrenburg sets out to denounce technological progress, he revels in the demonic beauty of cars. Indeed, the rhythms of *The Life of the Automobile* are that of a car on a highway or of a teletype machine. It is a montage novel, a production in the industrial mode—as are the most original documentary films of the period, like Dziga Vertov's *Kino Pravda*. *The Life of the Automobile* is, in fact, supposed to be a documentary. "This is not a novel," Ehrenburg asserts, "This is a stock market bulletin and this is a political history. There is no room for poetic digressions." The modernist speciality is finding poetry in what had been perceived as nonpoetic, and *The Life of the Automobile* is suffused with the poetry of the car and of industrial civilization—a poetry that both seduces Ehrenburg and appalls him.

The writers of the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s thought that by representing their world in a bold, formally experimental style they were in fact furthering the revolution. "Our thinking," Ehrenburg wrote in the Constructivist magazine *Object*, which he edited with the architect El Lissitzky in Berlin in 1921 and 1922, "is characterized by the attempt to turn away from the old subjective, mystical conception of the world and to create an attitude of universality—clarity—reality." Constructivism is one of a number of variations that have been played on the modernist instrument. Though its views are often hard to distinguish from those of Futurism or, for that matter, of certain other modernist stances, constructivism stresses the political and attempts, like the revolution which inspired it, to represent the world in its concrete material essence. The reality of the world is to be found, first and foremost, in its material objects, which are, for the Constructivist writer, the great subject. Modernism in literature and the visual arts generally have been infatuated with the found object and with the poetry of technology, but Constructivism proposes that these changes in material reality are the stuff of social change, and the Constructivist treatment of objects claims to reveal the way the world really works.

For all his distance from Marxist ideology at the time he wrote *The Life of the Automobile*, what Ehrenburg attempted there was to write not a Futurist but a materialist novel: one in which life proceeds, in its orthodox Marxist way, from material conditions. It is no accident, given the convergence between certain modernist presuppositions and Marxist first principles, that many modernists tried to be Communists. It is no accident, also, that the modernist writers who became Communists entirely ruined their talents—whether or not they lived under Communist governments. The difference in literary achievement between *Julio Jurenito* and *The Life of the Automobile* and such later novels as *The Fall of Paris*, *The Storm*, and *The Thaw* is huge, but it is no more appalling than the gap between Aragon's brilliant early novel, *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926, translated by Frederick Brown in 1970 as *Nightwalker*), and his Popular Front kitsch like *Aurélien* (1946). In the end, modernism—outcast from the Left—became an aesthete's position and still remains so. Perhaps this is why *The Life of the Automobile*, although it seems to have little relevance to the direction of current Russian literature, has much for ours. The nonfiction or documentary novel is one of the forms attracting American writers these days—think of Doctorow's *Ragtime* or Coover's *The Public Burning*—and *The Life of the Automobile* is among the first and one of the most successful examples of the form.

DAVID RIEFF

BARTHELME'S LIFE WITH FATHER

THE DEAD FATHER. By Donald Barthelme. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. \$7.95.

GUILTY PLEASURES. By Donald Barthelme. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. \$7.95.

GREAT DAYS. By Donald Barthelme. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. \$8.95.

Numerous fathers are represented in Donald Barthelme's second novel, *The Dead Father*: Father Saga, Father Epic, and Father Novel, as well as God the Father, Mr. President, Your Holiness, and doubtless somewhere angles and aspects of the Real Father who engendered skeptical Thomas, the son in charge of the funeral cortege, and the bad bastard son, Edmund, who merely drinks. Exemplary sons—Thomas is surly and occasionally stutters, Edmund drinks, their imperious father has become an intolerable drag, and yet they must bear him to the bitter end. In short the Dead Father is finally everyone's father, the great mutilated self-important, self-indulgent Super-ego whom we pull along behind us, the Past that is the Future, the inner voice inexorably saying "yes no yes no yes no yes no," and Barthelme's telling of this universal drama is—well, characteristically Barthelmean. Allusions to Shakespeare and Swift carom in the text; one might say that an elephantine Lear is herein hauled across Lilliput through the land of the fatherless Wends. Barthelme comically invokes the relevant literature, but his statement of the theme, however widespread, is at last distinctively American in its expression.

The Dead Father is large. So, too, is the imperative to do away with him. "*We want the Dead Father to be dead.*" But the dragged father continues to speak, to declare his omnipresence, and obviously no one is free so long as he is there, speaking, saying *we* will do this, *we* will do that. Even the father at times senses his heaviness and is amazed, like HCE, in Joycean runs: "I the All-Father but I never figured out figured out wot sort of animal AndI was. Endshrouded in endigmas. Never knew wot's wot. I reguarded my decisions and dispositions but there wasn't timeto timeto timeto. Endmeshed in endtanglements." Such are the lessons of the All-Father. He doesn't have time to figure it out, either. One is enraptured (like Emerson) by this knowing impudence, this alert and sharp perception of the deep ignorance that fills Dad's lectures on the real. This is Franklin observing a French king, John Adams a Prince-Regent. We, too, want

this large cumbersome object, this feeling, this stupid past, out of our lives. The anonymous author of a manual for sons in *The Dead Father* indicts fatherhood with Jeffersonian vigor, urges responsible parricide, and then proposes a new form of checked and balanced paternity. "*Fatherhood can be, if not conquered, at least 'turned down' in this generation.*" Indeed what emerges in the novel is a fierce voicing of American anxiety so pure, so artlessly innocent and funny, so classically declarative, that *The Dead Father* deserved really some kind of hyperbolic Bicentennial Award. Barthelme should have dined at the White House, appeared on *Meet the Press*, and been granted the feudal rights to a small island in the West Indies. "I'm too young," says this Dead American Father when asked to sign his will and relinquish his keys. Only an aging son can feel that dread. And this is how we recognize our historicity, our imminent demise, our own failed fatherhood. "I'm too young," says the Dead Father. And we are all in our seventies.

This is the deception Barthelme unmasks in his novel. Nobody wants to be a father in America, least of all an American father who is also an artist, because fathers are for sententious dying while the earth is for the living, the world is for the young, and on that unshakable piece of foolishness the entire United States as a cultural entity firmly rests. History is supposed to stop in the New World. We are supposed to be wiser than our beguiled fathers. We are not here to reread the Dead Father's tiresome lines. The novel ends with the persuaded father reluctantly crawling into his grave. "I'm in the hole now, said the Dead Father." Julie holds his hand. "One moment more! said the Dead Father." Then: "Bulldozers." Surely a version of the American Dream: the old fart expires. *Henceforth, be masterless!* This is where Walt Whitman begins in the preface to the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, with a bulldozer. The father's signifying carcass is trucked from the house just as the forthcoming "well-shaped" heir arrives. And it is where Huck Finn begins in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, shucking an obscene and murderous father. American literature, as D. H. Lawrence recognized long ago, is largely the trick-strewn creation of uncomfortable sons trying to bury their fathers. Barthelme gives that interpretation a twist. The reverse of the Lawrentian coin—*Henceforth, be masterless!*—is crudely inscribed: *Do not be old*. American sons are inveterate sons, seduced by their dreams of rebellion, their fantasies of refusal, and they will read the manual for sons in *The Dead Father* with a bitter glee, noting how precisely Dad is caught there in his dumb poses and cruel routines. But after the bulldozing in this novel,

after the demise, there is only the silence of the blank page. *The Dead Father* is not a preface to Tom's happy song.

Barthelme touches these soft spots in our consciousness with unerring accuracy, but it must be said, too, that the pressure of these touches in *The Dead Father* is deft—it doesn't bruise. The swing of his writing in this book is so light and so heavy, Barthelme flirts adeptly with ideas, the narrative has a teasing seriousness stroked into it, and finally there it is—or where is it? Certainly this elusiveness constitutes a great part of his charm as a writer. He is precisely where most critics see him, at the forefront of the contemporary, skillfully manipulating the ephemeral in a fast culture. And it is true, no one does this as well as Barthelme. His fiction blends the technique of collage with that of orchestration. There are picture and text, there are also the flick and clash of different discursive channels. Barthelme composes verbal incoherence, twisting and turning it into spasms of revelation. We know this nonsense, we recognize its phrases, this is our own gabbling. Set contrapuntally within the mock-saga, mock-epic, mock-novel of the father's long death are a series of baffled conversations, shreds of speech (somewhat like the noise in *Nashville*) that tell us again and again: "I read about it. In *Die Welt*." "Oh yes I read about it. In the *Svenska Dagbladet*." "I read about it in *Le Monde*." This is the knowledge of information, knowledge that damages the brain, and this is how we know what we know. I read about it in the *Scientific American*. How my heart beats, how cells reproduce. And yet, like a Dada urinal, these long strings of talk-talk have a compelling force. Through the random utterances, this static of data, stricken voices struggle to gain a wavelength. But the place of these sections in the flow of Barthelme's narrative is not clear. Is this what remains when the discourse of the novel has been bulldozed, the meaning of heroic enterprise reduced?

In *City Life*, in the brilliant sketch, "At the Tolstoy Museum," the narrator wanders through the great halls and chambers of Tolstoy's *oeuvre*. He pauses before a fifty-foot high Tolstoyan waistcoat, he considers the immensity of the *oeuvre*, the extent of the accomplishment, but what he cherishes amid all this imaginative richness is a small fable concerning faith. Tolstoy wanted to believe in something. The narrator wants to believe in Tolstoy. But there is too much of him, too much plot, too much prose, too much moral earnestness. Tolstoy's accusing stare greets us at the entrance to this sketch. The narrator hesitates in the "Summer in the Country" room and then doggedly decides to tramp on to "A Landlord's Morning." Evidently he is in the short-fiction wing of the Tolstoy Museum. The sketch is merely an

amusing way of relating the experience of reading Tolstoy, and no more, and it is also a gesture (Mark Twain's gesture in *Innocents Abroad* as he scrutinizes the Old Masters), and it is also a lucid description of an exasperated modern writer—a son, not a father. Like so much of Barthelme's work, the sketch itself is mercurial, it can't be leaned on, and it is in a book (*City Life*) that itself oscillates wildly between cool sardonic jokes and a deep sense of despair. It is at once so light and so heavy. *Sadness* is more of this uneven same, and so, too, is *The Dead Father*.

What's a son to do? After Joyce, after Pound, after Joseph Stalin, and Mao Tze Tung? "You must become your father, but a paler, weaker version of him. The enormities go with the job, but close study will allow you to perform the job less well than it has previously been done, thus moving toward a golden age of decency, quiet, and calmed fevers. Your contribution will not be a small one, but 'small' is one of the concepts that you should shoot for." That is, the son is to become a humorist. Small is beautiful. Large is the Father. It is in fact the restraint of humor that checks the course of Barthelme's irony, and cuts his questioning short. "I am a double-minded man," the narrator of "The Leap" intones in Barthelme's most recent collection of stories, *Great Days*, and then has wonderful fun with Kierkegaard. Perhaps this is the true spectacle in Barthelme's fiction: an intelligent irony, dire in its Kierkegaardian swerve, inclosed by, tripped up by, daunted by a loony humor. We witness the expiration of authority in *The Dead Father*, but what of the Living Mother? "She was often underly generous." There she is, spilled into a meditation on "The New Music" in *Great Days*. She is the Terrible Mother to the same extent that He is the Furious Father, humorously reduced, as true, as ludicrous, as dumb, as powerful as Repression itself. "Momma didn't 'low no clarinet played in here. Made me sad." So the complaint is figured in the speech of Huck and Holden, and it, not the discourse of the ironist, predominates. This voice, wistfully smart, speaks everywhere in *Great Days*. It is as though Barthelme, so alert to what is shallow in discourse, has grasped in its deep the rock-hard childishness, the indomitable immaturity, that speaks in all our speech, and has begun now to experiment with it. Daddy's dead, and Momma didn't 'low. In "Belief" four senior citizens sit on a bench in Washington Square Park and discuss—things. A single article of belief is at last produced. It is an injunction taken from Hasidic writing: *It is forbidden to grow old*. There is a chorus: "I could do without irony." After the dead father, the great day.

NEIL SCHMITZ

LETTERS

More on Hannah Arendt

EDITORS:

The most revealing moment in Leon Botstein's defense of Hannah Arendt against my critique of her political existentialism comes in his attempt to explain away her admittedly faulty reading of Marx. Arendt, he claims, did not usually search "for a *correct* interpretation . . . but rather a suggestive, defensible one." This unorthodox approach to her material, he claims, was justified by her political intentions: "Hers was a quest for an effective interpretative history, for a political *praxis* through history. Her use of Marx, however inadequate from a narrow historical and textual vantage point, appeared legitimate. . . ." Whether or not Arendt would have accepted this characterization is less important than the fact that Botstein finds it beyond reproach, and indeed imitates it in his own reading of her work.

There are many examples of Botstein's curious method—his putting words in my mouth concerning the *Eichmann in Jerusalem* debate, his false supposition of her friendly relations with the Frankfurt School, his misreading of Arendt's attitude towards the biblical contribu-

tion to her notion of glory, his mistaken understanding of her desire to banish the processes of history from her ideal political arena—but limitations of space force me to confine myself to three particularly telling ones. The first concerns the issue of truth and politics, the second the ethical dimension of her political theory, and the third the link between political existentialism and fascism.

According to Botstein, Arendt's "lifelong commitment to the truth as she saw it" contradicts my assertion that the "search for truth had no place in the public realm for Hannah Arendt." The source of my contention, which Botstein entirely ignores, is her essay on "Truth and Politics," where she clearly states that both rational and factual truth are opposed to the persuasive exchange of opinion, which is the essence of the political. "Truth carries within itself an element of coercion . . . seen from the viewpoint of politics, truth has a despotic character." The essay ends with a plea to respect the border between politics and truth, the very line Botstein thinks she advocates crossing. While he is certainly correct in praising her own personal desire to tell the truth, he fails to see that she was a *theoretician* of politics and not a true practitioner for precisely that reason.

Botstein is equally misguided in this appraisal of Arendt's attempt to separate politics from ethics, which I argued was characteristic of the political existentialist position in general. Botstein takes issue with this contention by claiming that her politics did indeed contain a "profound concern for ends." The evidence he adduces comes from her essay "What is Freedom?" which he reads to be arguing that principle and virtue are necessary elements in political action. The "principle" that she discusses, however, is explicitly derived from Montesquieu, who used it to mean the dominant inspiration of action for a government, which is not equivalent to an ethical norm. The examples she gives of principle show how far removed from Botstein's reading she was: "honor or glory, love of equality, which Montesquieu called virtue, or distinction or excellence . . . but also fear or distrust or hatred." As for the virtue he claims she advocates, in the very next paragraph, she praises Machiavelli's notion of *virtù* the meaning of which, she claims, "is best rendered by 'virtuosity,' that is, an excellence we attribute to the performing arts." For Arendt, it is *virtù* and not virtue that best illustrates what she means by "freedom as inherent in action."

Botstein further argues that Arendt's ethical concerns are best demonstrated in her belief that Kant's categorical imperative should be the basis of politics. But in the several places in her work where she discusses that injunction, Arendt specifically rejects its usefulness for political action. In *The Human Condition*, she sees it as the "greatest expression" of "the anthropocentric utilitarianism of *homo faber*," which she found antithetical to politics, and argues that Kant wrongly identified politics with the making inherent in legislation. In *Between Past and Future*, she argued that the categorical imperative was "based upon the necessity for rational thought to agree with itself," which relates it to that monological search for a coercive truth she attacked as antipolitical in "Truth and Politics." It is thus not in Kant's second *Critique*, Arendt insisted, that his true political theory can be found, but in the *Critique of Judgment*, where he outlined his aesthetics. In fact, she explicitly commended the faculty of taste, based on the anticipation of communicative consensus, as the truly political, and not the categorical imperative. And finally, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she concluded that despite Eichmann's pathetic distortions in his attempt to

cloak his actions in the categorical imperative, "there is not the slightest doubt that in one respect Eichmann did indeed follow Kant's precepts: a law was a law, there could be no exceptions."

Because Botstein misunderstands the depth of her insistence that politics was a realm apart, he explains away her perverse refusal to link political freedom with emancipation from social and economic domination by saying that, in the 1950s, it was reasonable to assume that technological solutions to the latter problems were feasible. Although he admits that this assumption is "dated from today's vantage point," he fails to grasp its deeper flaw. The ideology of technical rationality as the answer to political conflict led to the very withering away of the political sphere Arendt so detested; it was no less a mystification when applied to social or economic conflict. Arendt failed to appreciate the link because of her dogged insistence on the autonomy of the political and her concomitant denigration of the links between politics and socioeconomic realities.

The most objectionable of Botstein's distortions is his attribution to me of the charge that "Arendt, despite appearances, succumbed somehow to fascism

and was partially, by association, responsible for fascism." As I specifically warned in my essay, I raised the problem of Arendt's relation to the earlier political existentialists not to smear her through guilt by association, but rather to establish the context in which her seemingly unique ideas begin to make sense. Moreover, I carefully pointed out that the political existentialists of the twenties and thirties were themselves not Fascists, but rather that "all of them, to one degree or another, have been seen by most historians as having prepared the way for fascism." As I clearly stated, their credo was "not entirely blameless in the rise of fascism," which is very different from identifying them with the Nazis. And, in addition, I argued that Arendt, learning from many of their mistakes, presented a "tender" rather than "tough" version of the political existentialist position. The links I was trying to make manifest were in fact later observed by Sheldon Wolin, certainly no foe of Arendt, in his review of *The Life of the Mind*, where he wrote, "It is ironical that an author whose reputation was established by studies of totalitarianism and Nazi war crimes should have been deeply influenced by two writers who, for different reasons

and with contrasting plausibility, have been accused of Nazi sympathies, Nietzsche before the fact, Heidegger for more substantial reasons."

Unlike Wolin, however, I was trying to see more than irony in the situation. For what disturbed me was the extent to which the political existentialists, with their exaltation of *politique pour la politique* and denigration of reason, utility and morality, provided few safeguards against the Fascist threat. Arendt's variant of the tradition seemed to me to provide not very many more. Or, as George Kateb put it in an essay written after my own and far more friendly to Arendt, her justification of greatness and glory as ends in themselves was "playing with fire."

Botstein's attempt to protect Arendt against any and all criticisms is perhaps a measure of her unique power to evoke deeply felt responses. Her memory, however, would be better served by making a more sober assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of her thought. Hannah Arendt was too unsentimental a thinker to confuse hagiography with critical appreciation; would that some of her current admirers were as tough-minded as she.

MARTIN JAY

Leon Botstein Replies:

I regret that Mr. Jay, in his reply to my response to his original article on Hannah Arendt, thinks I set out to defend Hannah Arendt. Unfortunately, upon reading Mr. Jay's original piece, I failed to recognize Arendt sufficiently either to defend or criticize. Rather, my purpose was to refute Mr. Jay.

I would like to address three minor points with which Jay begins. First, I did not state or imply that I found Arendt's reading of Marx "beyond reproach." I sought only to point out that Arendt's method was, on occasion, to use authors as reinterpreted props for her own theoretical positions. In my view, the historical accuracy or plausibility of her interpretation of a past thinker was not necessarily linked to the power or cogency of her own political theoretical claims. These interpretations served a useful purpose in leading Arendt to her own argument; as interpretations they could have been mistaken, as in the case of Marx, she developed a simplified, although plausible and historically understandable construct.

Second, his own words, primarily "allegation" and "complicity," reveal a lack of understanding of what the Eichmann book sought to demonstrate: a

wholesale reorganization of moral categories and judgments, of the consequences of normal actions, of the impact of innocent behavior so as to discredit a facile, conventional assignment of complicities in and responsibility for the Holocaust. Even when she discussed insane collaborators like Rumkowski in Lodz (p. 119), Arendt did not allege complicity.

Third, while I accept the historical inaccuracy of my extension of Arendt's friendship with Walter Benjamin to others in the Frankfurt School (I was aware, from Arendt directly, of her antipathy to Adorno, for example) my point, Jay's correction notwithstanding, remains: Arendt was not unaware of the reinterpretation of Marx underway by her contemporaries. Her personal library certainly bears this out, if her circle of friendly acquaintances—beyond Benjamin—does not.

In his reply, Jay misconstrues Arendt's "Truth and Politics" essay. First, although she was not a refugee from the barricades of politics, she considered writing and speaking as political acts. She was not, in her own self-image, merely a theoretician, removed from politics. Her personal involvement in Jewish politics from the early 1930s to the early 1950s is but one piece of evidence. Second, her clear

distinction between rational and factual truth and political argument and opinion is part of her argument which seeks to establish the danger, in modern politics, that the truth can become so manipulated and unrecognizable, often through media, that it loses its visible *sui generis* aspect. The *descriptive* distinction in Arendt's essay between factual and rational truth and opinion does not imply a *normative* one about a separation of truth from political activity.

I argued in my original reply to Jay that Arendt's concept of action contained a concern for the ends of action and did not constitute as Jay argues, a separation of normative considerations in ends from action and the means of politics. In discussing the question of "principles" of action, Jay simplifies Montesquieu and Machiavelli. The motivating forces of government in Montesquieu's sense, for Arendt, had parallels in individual behavior, as the discussion of storytelling and remembrance in *The Human Condition* indicates. Furthermore, *virtù* is, for Machiavelli, more than technique, but contains an explicit concern for excellence in ends, for the telos of action.

Jay's peculiar sloppiness in reading Arendt is visible again in his reply to my brief reference to Kant. Nowhere did I state or

imply that "Kant's categorical imperative should be the basis of politics." Rather, I alluded to a Kantian bias on Arendt's part towards transcending merely instrumental considerations in judging action. Jay misreads Arendt's discussion of Kant in *The Human Condition*. Arendt recognizes Kant's effort to transcend the means-end category, to "relegate it to its proper place" and prevent its use in the field of "political action." She distinguishes Kant's effort from prior "unhindered and unguided" efforts, and from comparable pre-Kantian "platitudes." Kant's effort to effect a lasting critique of instrumentality and utilitarianism is precisely the one Arendt takes up later in the book. Like Kant, Arendt seeks to merge or rather abolish facile means-ends distinctions in her concept of action so that the ultimate ends of politics and public life become integrated in man's capacity to act.

Furthermore, Arendt, through her entire work, displayed an admiration for Kant. I mentioned the impact of his historical vision, and Arendt's mention of his work on the nature and limits of reason. As to the quote from "Truth and Politics" about Kant that Jay invokes, he is simply wrong. All Arendt does is credit Kant as a major figure in developing the

criterion of internal consistency for rational truth. Again, truth, for Arendt, is necessary as a challenge in politics precisely for the tension truth creates for the political process. That the truth-teller cannot and should not be the possessor of political power and stands apart from political processes is a functional, somewhat psychological perception which hardly confirms Jay's view that for Arendt, the search for truth has no place in the public realm. The inherent qualities of truth, which Kant did much to clarify, justify the vital role of truth in providing a sustained corrective to normal political discourse.

That Arendt did not view the categorical imperative as a political category, but rather as the result of a philosophical consideration of the normative possibilities in ethics merely reflected her correct reading of Kant. But that still leaves the fact that Kantian ethical concerns help explain her association of freedom and action. Finally, Jay's quote from *Eichmann in Jerusalem* refers to the discussion of justice and the demands of law in which Kant explores the inherent logical requirements of the concept of law. Arendt is ironic, for Jay's quote comes at the end of a long two-page discussion of Kant in the Eichmann trial. Arendt clearly

recognizes the vulgar, anti-contextual misinterpretation visible in Eichmann's notion of obedience to law *qua* law, divorced from a consideration of the origin or content of a particular law. The two pages preceding the quote Jay uses are a critique of Eichmann's attempt to invoke Kant on his own behalf. The quote does not argue against the categorical imperative. Rather, it refers back to the "household" version of Kant and to Eichmann's substitution of practical reason with the will of the Fuehrer. Jay misrepresents Arendt's defense of Kant against Eichmann's crass misuse of Kant on behalf of wholly un-Kantian behavior.

As to Jay's response to the technological optimism that Arendt displayed in the 1950s, the possibility still remains that, despite that perhaps naive optimism, Arendt's focus on purely political activity as a separate, but not autonomous sphere still constitutes a powerful and useful perception. It need not have anything to do with "political existentialism." It constitutes a cogent corrective to even obscure Marxist efforts to subsume and eliminate the notion of the political.

This brings me to the last point in Jay's reply. I regret that he thinks I misrepresented his circumlocution regarding

Arendt and the thinkers he associates her with, that their ideology "was not entirely blameless in the rise of fascism." Assuming for a moment that Jay's label on Arendt is convincing, then his words do have the ring of an allegation of historical responsibility. Certainly he did not charge Arendt with being a Nazi, but some sort of peculiar historical reasoning and accusation lingers in the last paragraph of Jay's original piece. I challenged them as glib and arrogant. Jay's claims about Arendt's supposed political existentialism are precisely the kind of debasement of truth into mere opinion which Arendt so fears in the essay "Truth and Politics." Even if minor philosophers affect history, Arendt was simply blameless in every common sense meaning of that word for the rise of fascism, Fascist thinking or the charms of comparable notions. Her thinking was wholly opposed to fascism, grew directly in response to it and reflected none of its suppositions. I should like to point out that all of Arendt's work was committed to preventing a recurrence of the catastrophe of fascism; what greater "safeguards" she could have provided, I do not know.

Jay's use of Sheldon Wolin in his own defense is the last example of wilful misreading I would like to discuss. Wolin is

exclusively ironic; his point has nothing to do with Jay's. Wolin is not arguing, for example, that Nietzsche was indeed "not entirely blameless in the rise of fascism." Wolin only refers to that accusation and its prominence and popularity.

I am saddened by the hostil-

ity and insulting quality of Jay's reply. Let me therefore restate my original intention in replying to his article. I thought that Jay misread and misunderstood Arendt. He, in my view, created a nonfactual person and political theory, and linked it to pre-Fascist and Fascist-like thinking.

Ludwig Greve

HANNAH ARENDT

The following poem about Hannah Arendt, translated from the German, might add a personal note to the exchange about her work. It was sent to us by Mary McCarthy.

Three, four steps she feels her way down, as if
water were there, wherever she comes from—her gaily-colored
dress, American, means nothing, it is her pride which is foreign;

such an air of wildness around her mouth, where
have I seen it? on Greek coins, with their images
blurred here and there where the fingertips of many generations

have imbued the god with a bit of feeling,
taught this youth the meaning of frailty. Her voice,
shot with dark rumbling and laughter, is quite extraordinary;

not a singer, she can extract from thoughts a
resonance as singers do from deep inside their bellies. Smiling
she
greeted me in the crowded cafe—we leaned back as at Passover

sharing what we had, the bitter but also
the sweet of our exile, the freedom. Her lips
quivered when I, as years before in trying to hold a girl,

said the wrong thing from sheer excitement,
but without reflection she would fling her answer
down, and there really was a girl before me. Every morning at
her desk,

sorting letters, she would speak with her
dead master; whoever came in met a
gaze of such expectancy that even the lowliest

did their utmost not to disappoint her. In the evenings
she enjoyed her meal when friends from all over
came, and she found a home in three languages. But which of us
leaning

forward right in the middle of the conversation
can still recite poems like that, German poems,
word for word. . . . You bore the burden of your past, Hannah,
nothing was lost.

In Response to Harold Rosenberg

EDITORS:

In Melvin Tumin's interview with the late Harold Rosenberg in your Number Four of 1978, the latter is reported as saying:

... The practical problem is when a collector comes up to me and says, "Should I buy this for \$10,000?" That's a practical problem. I never answer such questions. I say, "Go and see Clem Greenberg. He gives advice to collectors. I just write about 'art.' I don't know anything about the market. I don't know how much you should pay for anything."

Were Mr. Rosenberg still alive I'd be able to ask him to name collectors I've advised about prices, and also to say which of them had been sent by him. Not that I think there's anything reprehensible about advising art collectors about prices, but Mr. Rosenberg obviously thought there was, and meant to throw his purity into relief against my

supposed lack of purity. I'm ready to grant him his purity, but not at the cost of facts. And I'm ready to accept my lack of purity, but again not at the cost of facts. Some facts happen to be there in Mr. Rosenberg's case, and some aren't there in my case.

A while ago, in this same magazine in a piece called "From the Notebook" (I've forgotten the date), Mr. Rosenberg wrote to the effect that Americans were more or less alone in their prejudice against *ad hominem* remarks. But he said nothing about the necessity of such remarks being true.

De mortuis nihil nisi bonum, etc. Yes. And it's a little ghoulish to take issue with an utterance published posthumously. But I could not let Mr. Rosenberg's remark about me stand unquestioned. Its substance was too far from the truth, and its intention too far from good faith, to allow for the observance of every propriety.

Clement Greenberg

Ploughshares

Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Russell Banks, Michael Benedikt, Frank Bidart, Elizabeth Bishop, George Bogin, John Malcolm Brinnin, Henry Bromell, Raymond Carver, James Crumley, Madeline DeFrees, Norman Dubie, Andre Dubus, George P. Elliott, Seymour Epstein, George Garrett, Albert Goldbarth, Paul Hannigan, William Harmon, Anthony Hecht, Richard Howard, Fanny Howe, Richard Hugo, David Kalstone, Robert Kelly, William Kittredge, Bill Knott, Maxine Kumin, Mary Lavin, F.R. Leavis, Robert Lowell, Thomas Lux, James Alan McPherson, William Meredith, James Merrill, Paul Metcalf, Stephen Minot, Brian Moore, Eugenio Montale, Frederick Morgan, Tim O'Brien, Linda Pastan, Octavio Paz, Joyce Peseroff, Marge Piercy, Robert Pinsky, Lawrence Raab, Kenneth Rexroth, Ira Sadoff, Andrew Salkey, Jane Shore, Charles Simic, Kathleen Spivack, Maura Stanton, George Starbuck, Mark Strand, William Styron, Peter Taylor, James Tate, Helen Vendler, John Weiners, James Whitehead, Richard Wilbur, Hilma Wolitzer, Charles Wright, Richard Yates.

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